



Abijah and Asa: A Perfect Heart

Lesson 7

for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

We began this series by observing that we want people to fall into nice, neat categories of good guys and bad guys. Scripture is challenging, however, because Scripture is honest about our heroes and our villains. In Kings and Chronicles, we see good kings behave poorly, and bad kings do good. Sometimes we honestly don't know how a king will be remembered until we read the summary about their lives that God himself gives.

Today, for example, we will see the lives of two kings: Abijah and Asa. Both publicly declare allegiance to God. Both trust in God for military victory. Both make some pretty disappointing choices during their career. Yet the summaries God gives of the two of them are wildly different. We like to have nice clean categories of human heroes or villains, but the Bible gives us honest assessments of these men, and these honest assessments often blends the two.

Can you think of any examples of people who have a mixed character? Bad people who occasionally do good or good people who sometimes do wrong?

What does it take to have a perfect heart? Of the two kings we examine, one will be said to have a perfect heart, the other will not. As we see the successes and failures of both men, we will hopefully gain a little clarity in understanding what it is God looks for.

Teacher's Note: It will not be necessary to cover the following section with your table. It is included to give you a firm grasp on some potentially confusing issues and will allow you to intelligently answer any questions that might come up. This section will not be included in the handout that is given.

[A Confusing Family Tree]

The family tree for Abijah and Asa is also a little complex, but can be untangled with some careful attention to detail. One reason for this is that in Kings and Chronicles we find certain individuals have names with different forms, and perhaps may even have two slightly different names. Another challenge is that in Hebrew the terms "mother" and "father" can also mean "grandfather" and "grandmother" and "son" or "daughter" can mean "grandson" or "granddaughter." Once we understand these two facts, we are able to piece together the details of Abijah and Asa's family tree:

- David's son Absalom (also called Abishalom in 1 Kings 15:2, 10) had one daughter, whom he named Tamar (2 Samuel 14:27).
- Tamar married a man named Uriel, and together they had a daughter named Maacah (also called Micaiah in 2 Chronicles 13:2).
- Rehoboam married Maacah, the daughter of Uriel (2 Chronicles 13:1) and granddaughter of Absalom (2

Chronicles 11:20; 1 Kings 15:2, 10). Together they had Abijam, (called Abijah in Chronicles) (1 Kings 15:2).

- Asa was the granddaughter of Maacah, but apparently his grandmother still held powerful sway over the nation during his reign, as he is described as her son (grandson) and had to publicly denounce her (1 Kings 15:10, 13).

The key takeaways for this lesson are 1) that the names Absalom, Maacah, and Abijah have alternate spellings, and 2) that Maacah is the mother of Abijah and the grandmother of Asa.

Abijam/Abijah

I. Chronicles' Summary of Abijah¹ (2 Chronicles 13)

A. The battle (13:1-3)

Chronicles only gives one story from Abijah's short reign of 3 years. What the writer of Chronicles relays here was no doubt the high point of Abijah's reign. In a lopsided battle with Jeroboam, Abijah won an incredible victory. We aren't told why the two nations went to war, but we can imagine countless reasons why these two kingdoms might have fought. Jeroboam's army was both larger (twice as large, in fact) and more expertly trained than Abijah's (they were "mighty men of valor").

B. The speech (13:4-12)

In this speech, Abijah makes the case for why Israel should give up this battle and go home.

¹ When discussing Chronicles, I use the name Chronicles does (Abijah), and when discussing Kings, I use the name Kings does (Abijam). Since the NT uses Abijah (Matthew 1:7), I use Abijah when discussing the king generally.

What are some of the reasons that Abijah gives why Jeroboam and his forces should quit?

Is there anything Abijah leaves out or misrepresents?

C. The outcome (13:13-22)

The end of this battle is a surprising twist. Jeroboam had superior numbers, superior training, and superior tactics. His plan to ambush Judah put them in a position where militarily the southern kingdom had no right winning this battle. But God stepped in and changed the outcome. Twice we are told God was responsible for the defeat of the northern tribes (13:15, 16). The reason for God's deliverance is given in 13:18, Judah relied on God for deliverance.

If this was all we had of Abijah, we would think that he was another one of the godly kings of Judah. However, we also have the account of Abijah in Kings, and the picture there is a little different.

II. Kings' Summary of Abijam (1 Kings 15:1-8)

Kings view of Abijam is about as negative as Chronicles is good. Kings tells us very little about Abijam's short reign, but it does tell us two critical things:

A. Abijam continued following idols (1 Kings 15:12-13).

Summarizing the short reign of Abijam, the author simply says that Abijam walked in the sins of his fathers.

What sins were Solomon and Rehoboam guilty of?

While Kings doesn't state specifically that Abijam pursued idols, we find out during the reign of his son that he had continued or at least permitted the worship begun by his father (1 Kings 14:23-24) and grandfather (1 Kings 11:4-8). His mother was also a strong influence on the nation to worship pagan gods, an influence Abijam apparently never challenged (1 Kings 15:13).²

B. Abijam's heart was not perfect (1 Kings 15:3).

We discussed this word before. The idea of perfect is not one of "sinless perfection," but rather the idea that his heart was complete or whole in the worship of God. Unlike David his (great grand)father, Abijam allowed the compromising tendencies of his father Rehoboam and his grandfather Solomon and allowed the worship of God to continue while at the same time tolerating the worship of pagan deities on the hills of Jerusalem.

III. Is this the same person?

Are Chronicles and Kings talking about the same person? Chronicles doesn't give us a divine evaluation of Abijam's rule like Kings does, but its description of his victory paints the king in a very good light. Kings, on the other hand, has

² As was noted in a previous lesson, the KJV translated the Hebrew *'asherah* (pl. *'asherim*) as grove(s), whereas modern translations believe this was the specific name of pagan deity. Recent archeological discoveries have uncovered the religious texts of the Canaanites, and Asherah was the name of one of the wives of Baal. In either case, the point is the same: Maacah made an image, either of Asherah or in a grove, and it was Asa who confronted her on it and burned it!

nothing good to say about Abijam and tells us that “he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.” Those who doubt the truthfulness of God’s Word will often point to examples like this to try to argue that Scripture contradicts itself.

Why might we be tempted to view these two accounts as contradictory?

How do they complement [build on] each other?

What does this teach us about human nature?

How does Abijah’s mixed character affect the way we think about his speech in Chronicles?

Why would God bless the speech of someone like that by giving them victory?

Asa

Asa was a very important king in Judah. His long reign (1 Kings 15:9-10) was a blessing of God and allowed him to have a successful and godly rule. Asa was a king who truly sought the Lord and led the nation in seeking the Lord (14:4, 7; 15:2, 4, 12, 13, 15).

I. Asa’s strong start (2 Chronicles 14)

A. Asa’s initial religious reforms (14:1-5)

Asa doesn’t waste any time when he comes to the throne. We are told that he immediately breaks down the idols that the nation had been worshipping, going so

far as to oppose his own grandmother who was leading in pagan worship (cf 1 Kings 15:13). But he not only removed the wrong way of worship, he encouraged the nation to seek the Lord. Finally, we have a king doing what God wanted the king to do!

B. Asa's successful national development (14:6-8)

As any good king, Asa is concerned with building up the interior of the nation. Given a lengthy period of peace at the start of his reign (14:1), Asa was able to build a strong foundation for times of war. These blessings are specifically tied to the people seeking God.

C. Asa's successful war (14:9-15)

An army of Ethiopians came out against the nation, testing the people's faith in God after they had enjoyed a time of ease and prosperity. After 10 years of peace, would the nation continue to follow God? They did, and God's blessing on them for their faithfulness led to a victory over a much more powerful army.

II. Asa's religious reforms (2 Chronicles 15)

Although Asa had cleaned up the nation before, there was still work to do. Asa removed idols that he missed during his first purge, and also cleaned up the cities he had captured. When God sent a prophet challenging the nation to serve him wholeheartedly, the nation recommitted to following God and God alone. This commitment went so far to threaten with the death penalty anyone who failed to follow the Lord. While that might seem extreme to us today, we need to remember that Israel as a nation was the people of

God. Today, the people of God is the church, not a political body, and so there will be some big differences between the way God operates with his people in the Old Testament and the New.

What does it show us that this reform happened after another reform had already happened? How should this affect the way we look at our own spiritual lives?

III. Asa's disappointing end (2 Chronicles 16)

Although Asa had done so well, his end was a sad tribute to what can happen when a person becomes lax in their spiritual life.

A. Asa trusts his own wisdom (16:1-6)

Baasha, the king of the north who followed Jeroboam, begins work on a city designed to hamper Asa's kingdom. No doubt concerned by the large numbers leaving his own kingdom and heading down south, Baasha decides to do prevent anyone else from going down to Judah. Rather than trust God as he had done before, Asa came up with his own plan to solve this issue. He took money from the temple and bought off Syria, Israel's northern enemy. Syria attacked Israel, and Baasha left all of the materials of the city he had been working on, which Asa then used to build up his own fortifications.

Asa's plan seemed to work initially. Why is it dangerous to go with "what works"? Why do you think God allowed this plan to succeed?

B. Asa rejects God's warnings (16:7-14)

God sends a prophet to Asa, warning him that he is rejecting the Lord and that he needs to return to God. Asa becomes furious with the prophet and throws him in prison. His rejection of God's Word leads to being a cruel leader over his own people. He then becomes ill and turns to doctors (potentially using magic/dark arts) to heal him rather than trust the Lord.

How is it possible that someone who did so well could turn so quickly?

Why do you think it was that Asa trusted God with an army of a million but not with the northern kingdom?

Conclusion

As we wrap up this lesson, it will be helpful to compare and contrast Asa and Abijah. One was a good king who did some bad things. The other was a bad king who did some good things. How should we as modern Christians think about this?

What is different between Asa and Abijah since one is described as having a perfect heart (1 Kings 15:14) whereas his father was described as not having a perfect heart (1 Kings 15:3)?

What would it look like for someone today to have a perfect heart?

How should we respond when good men fail, or when evil men do good?

How could teaching like this be abused? How can it be a help to us?