

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.

Forty-Fourth Week - Saturday

ASA

"And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: 'Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on Yahweh 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 Yahweh, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of Yahweh 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" (2 Chronicles 16:7-10).

The conduct of Asa on receiving tidings of the Cushite invasion was in all respects most praiseworthy and in perfect conformity with the principles of the theocratic constitution. It seems also to evince much sound judgment from a military point of view.

Rather than waiting in Jerusalem for the appearance of the enemy after they had ravaged the countryside in their march to the city, Asa instead marched to the southern frontier and gave battle to the enemy at one of the great passes into the country, that of Zephathah, where his grandfather had built the strong fortress of Mareshah. Posting his army at this pass was an admirable choice. Yet Asa was deeply conscious of his inability to resist the invaders in any strength of his own, and nothing can be finer than the prayer which he uttered before falling into mortal conflict with the enemy: *"Yahweh, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Yahweh our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Yahweh, You are our God; do not let men prevail against You!"*

From the beginning of their history, the Israelites never failed to be victorious in any battle undertaken in this spirit, evincing faith in Him who bound himself to respond. This was so much a matter of course that the historian simply and briefly adds, *"So Yahweh struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled."* They were pursued with great slaughter to their encampments and towns around Gerar. The spoil with which the Judahites returned was prodigious, being largely in sheep and camels. It must have made a material contribution to the substantial wealth of the country.

The result was peace and prosperity for many years, setting in motion a strong tide of migration into the kingdom from the more troubled one of Israel. This migration, however, then became a serious concern to Baasha, who was then upon the throne of Israel. Therefore he seized the town of Ramah, which lay within the territory of Judah six miles from Jerusalem on the way to Bethel, and began to turn it into a strong fortress. This audacious action filled Asa with a great dismay of heart--this same Asa who had not quailed before the hosts of Zerah!

The now important Syrian power seated at Damascus, which from its position was naturally hostile toward Israel, happened at this time to be under a treaty of peace with Baasha. Asa thought it not unlikely that the king, Ben-Hadad, might be induced to break the existing treaty with Israel, and with Syria suddenly appearing in the north of the kingdom of Israel, Baasha would be compelled to abandon his designs in Judah.

Asa tried this plan, and it succeeded. But he received this aid from Ben-Hadad at a most costly sacrifice; for he sent him all his silver and gold, whether in the form of treasure or vessels and spared neither the precious things of his own palace nor of the temple. For this part of his conduct, however, Asa was not blamed. The treasures which his ambassadors took to Ben-Hadad were no doubt more effective than their arguments would have been in prevailing upon Ben-Hadad to accede to a course so dishonorable.

Forthwith Ben-Hadad sent an army against the north of Israel and captured and plundered many important towns, ravaging the whole land of Naphtali and the country about the sea of Galilee. On hearing this, Baasha at once abandoned Ramah and went to protect his own country.

Nevertheless, however successful Asa was in his immediate goal of freeing Ramah, the thing he had done displeased the Lord. His offense was gross and accumulated. First, it was a lack of reliance upon the Lord, which in a really more urgent strait had won Asa so much honor. Second, it was tempting another--the king of Syria--to make a dishonorable breach of faith with Israel. Third, it brought a heathen destroyer into Israel, which was still the Lord's heritage though it did not belong to Judah.

A prophet was sent to rebuke Asa. It was intimated that he had not only lost a great victory over the Syrians, which the Lord would have given to him, but that his future reign should be troubled with wars. The former intimation is worthy of notice as being that rare kind which indicates what *would* have occurred had a certain course *not* been taken. We understand it to mean that Baasha would have called the Syrians to his aid and Asa would then have been afforded a signal victory over them both.

In his rage at being so rebuked, Asa sent the faithful prophet Hanani to prison. And this added to his original fault the grievous sin of persecuting an inspired messenger of Jehovah. Here we have the melancholy spectacle of a prophet of God imprisoned, not by an idolatrous or

notoriously wicked king, but by one who had hitherto borne a noble character and whose heart was substantially right with God. But as Bishop Hall charitably remarks: "It is a pity that the best man should be judged by each individual action and not by all; the whole course of our life must either allow or condemn us, not these sudden exceptions."