

1 Kings 15:1-16:28

Limits of the Text

1 Kings 15:1-16:28 is a complete literary unit. It gives a short summary for each of the reigns of the seven kings after Rehoboam and Jeroboam and before Ahab and the prophet Elijah.

Towards Authorial Intent

What is the author of Kings writing in this section of the book? It's not really a set of stories; each section is too short and doesn't include a discernable plot. It's not merely history. Though it is historical in that it chronologically describes various monarchs for Judah and Israel, the sort of things that we would expect to see summarized for kings, their military victories and economic accomplishments, are rarely mentioned. And a king who reigned seven days, Zimri, is given the same amount of space as a king who reigned twenty-four years, Baasha.

The answer to this question can be found by reviewing the introduction to Kings, where it was stated that the genre of the book of Kings is prophetic narrative, which is characterized (in part) by assessing the past based upon the covenants of God and by assessing characters based on how they accelerate or retard the blessings or judgments that God sends to Israel.¹ The author of Kings wrote historical summaries of the reigns of these kings while assessing them from God's point of view; what mattered most to God was the condition of their heart and their obedience to the covenants. That is the criteria by which these kings are judged.

External Context

The previous sections of Kings described how the world-renowned kingdom that Solomon built had deteriorated into two smaller kingdoms due to his sins and the sins of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. This section moves forward quickly in time, building towards the very wicked reign of Ahab.

¹ House, 57.

Interpretation

15:1 Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. 2 He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. 3 And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. 4 Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, 5 because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6 Now there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. 7 The rest of the acts of Abijam and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. 8 And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place.²

Abijam was the son of Rehoboam and the grandson of Solomon. The author summarized his three-year reign by saying he continued his father's sins because his heart was not wholly true to God. What were his father's sins? He was worshipping Canaanite religions, especially sex-oriented paganism (1 Ki 14:22-24). Abijam's mother, Maacah, an Ammonite, apparently played a central role in reviving these religions (1 Ki 14:21).

Given Abijam's sins and untrue heart, why was he allowed to rule at all? The author asserts that it was for David's sake alone. David, though not perfect, had been faithful to do what God wanted. God would be faithful to his descendents because of the Davidic covenant (2 Sa 7:12-16), even when his descendents were not faithful to him.³

9 In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah, 10 and he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. 11 And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done. 12 He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. 13 He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook Kidron. 14 But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days. 15 And he brought into the house of the Lord the sacred gifts of his father and his own sacred gifts, silver, and gold, and vessels.

Unlike his father, Asa's heart was wholly true to the Lord, and thus he did what was right in God's eyes; he was one of only eight kings in Judah to be judged so. What did he

² ESV.

³ House, 196.

do that earned this commendation from the writer of Kings? First, he systematically eliminated idolatry. Second, he removed Maacah from her position as queen mother. (As an aside, the ESV translates Maacah's relationship literally, but not accurately. The word in verse 10 is mother, but she was his grandmother, as can be seen from 1 Ki 15:2; the Hebrew often uses the word for father or mother to mean grandfather or grandmother or even more remote ancestors.⁴ As an example, see verse 11, where David is called Asa's father, when he's actually his great-great grandfather.⁵) Third, he replenished the temple treasury.

16 And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 17 Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 18 Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house and gave them into the hands of his servants. And King Asa sent them to Ben-hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, 19 "Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you a present of silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me." 20 And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel and conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21 And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and he lived in Tirzah. 22 Then King Asa made a proclamation to all Judah, none was exempt, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. 23 Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, and all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. 24 And Asa slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place.

Asa reigned forty-one years, a very long reign; he saw five different kings rule in Israel during this time, one of whom was Baasha, whose reign will be described in 1 Ki 15:33ff. Asa and Baasha were not on friendly terms, and at one point Baasha attempted an economic blockade. Ramah was a city that was only five miles north of Jerusalem; by fortifying it Baasha could prevent anyone in the north from coming in or out of Jerusalem.

Asa found a clever way out of the situation. He bribed Baasha's ally into attacking some of Baasha's strategic cities, and then hauled off all of Baasha's building supplies when he left. So were Asa's actions here good or bad? They were bad. Asa used bribery to encourage another king to sin and break a covenant; he trusted his political savvy

⁴ NET, 1 Ki 15:10.

⁵ Provan speculates that Asa was the result of an incestuous relationship between Abijah and Maacah, thus she would have literally been his mother (and his grandmother) (126).

instead trusting in God.⁶ So why didn't the writer of Kings explicitly state that Asa's actions were wrong? One, because it's obvious; no explicit statement is necessary. Two, Davis suggests that he wanted to emphasize Asa's overall obedience to God. It's as if he said, "Yes, Asa sinned here, but it's possible to be obedient to God and serve him!"⁷ A similar statement was made about David in 1 Ki 15:5.

25 Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. 26 He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. 27 Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him. And Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon. 28 So Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah and reigned in his place. 29 And as soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite. 30 It was for the sins of Jeroboam that he sinned and that he made Israel to sin, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. 31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

After Asa, the author of Kings backtracked in time to the kings of Israel. The reign of Nadab, Jeroboam's son, is summarized simply: He sinned like his father Jeroboam. Unlike Asa, his heart did not belong to God, and he did not attempt any religious reform. So God used Baasha to judge Nadab for his sin, though Baasha also served to fulfill God's judgment against Jeroboam for his sin of idolatry and the golden calves (1 Ki 14:10-11). Thus ended the first dynasty of Israel.

32 And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah, and he reigned twenty-four years. 34 He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. 16:1 And the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 "Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, 3 behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat." 5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 6 And Baasha slept with his fathers and was buried at Tirzah, and Elah his son reigned in his place. 7 Moreover, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu

⁶ Read 2 Chr 16:7-9, where Asa is rebuked for his lack of trust.

⁷ Davis, 175-176.

the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.

Baasha reigned much longer than his predecessor,⁸ yet the author of Kings summarized his reign the same way: He sinned like Jeroboam. As a result, Jehu⁹ prophesied that God would judge Baasha by destroying his house, just like he had Jeroboam's house.

God exalted Baasha out of the dust, which implies he raised him from humble origins to be the king, but Baasha did not serve God in turn. "The fact that Baasha did not turn to the Lord in spite of his being God's instrument of judgment on the house of Jeroboam suggests his complete blindness to the importance of spiritual matters in his own life and in that of his nation."¹⁰

There's an apparent contradiction in this text. On the one hand it says that God exalted him out of the dust, and Baasha fulfilled the prophecy against Jeroboam; on the other hand God prophesied judgment against Baasha and his house because he destroyed Jeroboam's house. So was it right or wrong for Baasha to have killed Jeroboam's house and become king? It seems that it was right for him to have been king, but something in the way in which he became king displeased God. Carson suggests he was too aggressive in his judgment of Jeroboam's house; he killed every living person, not just the males who might claim the throne (1 Ki 15:29).¹¹

8 In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah, and he reigned two years. 9 But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him. When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was over the household in Tirzah, 10 Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. 11 When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he struck down all the house of Baasha. He did not leave him a single male of his relatives or his friends. 12 Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, 13 for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, which they sinned and which they made Israel to sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols. 14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

If this paragraph seems familiar, it might be because we have seen a nearly identical reign, that of Nadab. Elah and Nadab were both the second (and final) king in their

⁸ In fact, his reign was the third longest of all the Israeli kings.

⁹ This Jehu, a prophet, is not the same as the Jehu of 2 Ki 9-10, the 11th king of Israel.

¹⁰ Walvoord, 1:520.

¹¹ Carson, 1 Ki 15:25.

respective dynasties, reigned two years,¹² continued in idolatry, were assassinated, and were supplanted by their assassin. The author of Kings noted nothing about Elah's reign; he was remembered for his idolatry and for being drunk at the time of his death. Thus ended the second dynasty of Israel.

15 In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, 16 and the troops who were encamped heard it said, "Zimri has conspired, and he has killed the king." Therefore all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17 So Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18 And when Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king's house and burned the king's house over him with fire and died, 19 because of his sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for his sin which he committed, making Israel to sin. 20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

Zimri thought himself a good candidate for a king, so following the precedence set by Baasha (1 Ki 15:27-28), he assassinated Elah and declared himself king. Unfortunately, no one else seemed to agree, so the people and the army made Omri king instead, leading to civil war; "Zimri learned to his chagrin that one dare not carry out a coup without the army's support."¹³ In the end he committed suicide. Even with such a short reign, the author of kings still evaluated it and found him wanting spiritually: He sinned like Jeroboam.¹⁴

21 Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts. Half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. 22 But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni the son of Ginath. So Tibni died, and Omri became king. 23 In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for twelve years; six years he reigned in Tirzah. 24 He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and he fortified the hill and called the name of the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill. 25 Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins that he made Israel to sin, provoking the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the might that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

¹² Since they counted any part of a year as a year, their reigns might have been as short as a few months.

¹³ Davis, 188.

¹⁴ Seven days seems like a really short time to make such a strong evaluation. Perhaps he fully supported Jeroboam's idolatry upon becoming king, or perhaps the author knew something of his life before he was king.

28 And Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab his son reigned in his place.

The author of kings noted two historical items concerning Omri's reign. One, he overcame a challenge to his rule, which had kept the country in civil war. Two, he established a new capital at Samaria. History tells us more. Samaria was a great choice for a capital; it was easily defensible yet still strategically accessible to traders and merchants.¹⁵ With this capital Omri was able to hold off the expanding Aramean and Assyrian empires to the north while defeating the Moabites to the southeast (a victory recorded on the famous Moabite Stone¹⁶). Omri was so successful that Assyrian documents at the time referred to Israel as the land of Omri,¹⁷ and he formed an alliance with the Phoenicians and sealed it with the marriage of his son Ahab (1 Ki 16:31).¹⁸ "Omri was something of a military, cultural, commercial, and political powerhouse."¹⁹

Yet despite these accomplishments, the author of kings was not impressed; to summarize his reign from God's perspective, Omri was an idolater and more wicked any of his predecessors.²⁰

¹⁵ House, 202.

¹⁶ Walvoord, 1:521.

¹⁷ House, 203.

¹⁸ Carson, 1 Ki 16:24.

¹⁹ Davis, 190.

²⁰ Though his son would soon take that title from him (1 Ki 16:33).

Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is an evaluation of the reigns of some kings.
2. National History – This is an evaluation of the reigns of some of the kings of the northern and southern kingdoms.
3. Redemptive History – This is an evaluation of the lives of some of the leaders of God's covenant people.

Jesus and the Gospel

This story reflects mankind's **need for redemption** through Jesus and the gospel.

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? We tend to live our lives without considering what things are important to God. We tend to be unaware of what God truly values.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God's grace to meet our need? God gives us reminders of what he values, examples of lives that pleased and did not please him.

Outline

This outline is based upon the reigns of the kings:

1. Abijam reigned over Judah for three years, and he walked in the sins of Rehoboam (1 Ki 15:1-8).
2. Asa reigned over Judah for forty-one years, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (1 Ki 15:9-24).
3. Nadab reigned over Israel for two years, and he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Ki 15:25-32).
4. Baasha reigned over Israel for twenty-four years, and he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Ki 15:33-16:7).
5. Elah reigned over Israel for two years, and he provoked the Lord with his idols (1 Ki 16:8-14).
6. Zimri reigned over Israel for seven days, and he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Ki 16:15-20).
7. Omri reigned over Israel for twelve years, and he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Ki 16:21-28).

Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 15:1-16:28 in order to teach exilic Jews that God judges a person to be successful when his heart is true and his actions are right.

Teaching Outline

God judges a person's life based upon his heart and his actions, and today I want to encourage you to have a heart that is wholly true to the Lord and actions that are right in his eyes. From our text today we are going to learn seven truths about being a success or failure in God's eyes:

1. Your life can be a failure, even when God is faithful (1 Ki 15:1-8).
2. Your life can be a success, even when you are not perfect (1 Ki 15:9-24).
3. Your life can be a failure, even when you work really hard (1 Ki 15:25-32).
4. Your life can be a failure, even when God promotes you (1 Ki 15:33-16:7).
5. Your life can be a failure, even when you party really hard (1 Ki 16:8-14).
6. Your life can be a failure, even when you take what you want (1 Ki 16:15-20).
7. Your life can be a failure, even when you accomplish great things (1 Ki 16:21-28).

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