

Form and Content in the Story of Asa in 2 Chr 13:23b-16:14: A Diachronic-Synchronic Reading

Itzhak Amar

Hemdat Ha'darom Academic Collage

rotaha@gmail.com

Abstract

In contrast to the brief and positive Deuteronomistic description of Asa's reign (1 Kgs 9-24), the Chronicler provides us with a complex, lengthy account (2 Chr 13:23b-16:14). The first part of his rule is depicted as good, the second as bad. This formulation creating various thematic, chronological, linguistic, and theological problems. Analyzing these both diachronically and synchronically, the complementary approach adopted herein reveals the unit's constitutive components, together with the central themes shaping it. Hereby, we gain a broader and deeper picture of the way in which Asa is portrayed, particularly in comparison with of his predecessors, Rehoboam and Abijah on the one hand and Jehoshaphat on the other.

Keywords

Asa – 2 Chronicles 14-16 – diachronic analysis – synchronic analysis

1 Introduction

An initial glance at the account of Asa's reign in 2 Chr 13:23b-16:14 immediately reveals that it is much more elaborate than the *Vorlage* in 1 Kgs 15:9-24.¹ The events described appear to derive from two different timeframes, the first (the 34 verses in 13:23b-15:19) being characterized by a positive, the second (2 Chr 16) by a negative perspective. The seam is clearly evinced by two verses

¹ The passage in 2 Chronicles comprises 48 verses in contrast to the 15 in 1 Kings.

that both divide the two periods and serve as their chronological continuation: “And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa” (2 Chr 15:19) indicates the end of the first phase, the second opening with 2 Chr 16:1: “In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of King Asa of Judah.”

During the first period, Asa carries out numerous cultic reforms (2 Chr 14:3-4; 15:8, 16). Asking his subjects to seek Yahweh and commit themselves to obeying the ordinances of the Torah (14:3), he binds them into a covenantal relationship with Yahweh, threatening those who refuse to obey the divine injunctions with death (2 Chr 15:13). In the wake of Azariah’s utterances, he undertakes a further widespread reform (15:8f). While he builds fortified cities and assembles a vast, 580,000-strong army (2 Chr 14:7).²

He then turns to the king of Aram for aid rather than Yahweh in order to remove the siege laid against him by Baasha, King of Israel, imprisoning the prophet Hanani for denouncing this act and oppressing the people by levying high taxes.³ He pays a heavy price for these acts, his legs being stricken with a wasting disease from which he never recovered.

Despite this clear division, this unit remains plagued with theological, chronological, and thematic problems, inconsistencies, and doublets. Revisiting these, I would like herein to seek to offer some solutions by examining the text both diachronically and synchronically—thereby elucidating the story as a whole.

2 The Problems

2.1 *Theological Difficulties*

The scholar most responsible for elucidating the Chronicler’s doctrine of retribution is Sarah Japhet.⁴ At first glance, the principles she determines govern

2 In characteristic fashion, the Chronicler tends to exaggerate. For the size of Asa’s army, see R. W. Klein, “How Many in a Thousand?”, in M. P. Graham et al. (eds.), *The Chronicler as Historian* (Sheffield, 1997), p. 281; N. Klein, “The Chronicler’s Code: The Rise and Fall of Judah’s Army in the Book of Chronicles”, *JHS* (2017).

3 According to Beentjes, Hanani exemplifies the Chronicler’s theological view of prophecy: see P. C. Beentjes “King Asa and Hanani the Seer: 2 Chronicles 16 as an example of the Chronicler’s view of prophets and Prophecy”, in B. Becking and H. M. Barstad (eds.), *Prophecy and Prophets in Stories: Papers Read at the Fifth Meeting of the Edinburgh Prophecy Network Utrecht, October 2013* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 141-151.

4 S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (New York, 1997), pp. 129ff. Scholars have recently begun questioning this theory, see B. E. Kelly,

the text we are discussing here: when Asa seeks Yahweh and asks the people to follow suit, he is rewarded; when he appeals to a foreign nation for help rather than trusting God, he is smitten with a crippling disease, dying after seeking a cure from the physicians.⁵

A number of features in the story nonetheless do not correspond to the doctrine Japhet outlines: Zerah the Cushite battles Asa despite the fact he and the people are said to seek Yahweh; Israel's siege against Asa does not appear to be prompted by any sin on Asa/the people's part; While Asa's appeal to the king of Aram for aid is represented as transgressive in nature, the siege is lifted and Geba and Mizpah are fortified—a reward usually reserved for righteous kings;⁶ Asa hands the temple treasures over to Ben-hadad, the prophet not appearing to denounce this as a sin;⁷ Asa's punishment announced by the prophet only arrives three years later, contravening the tenet that retribution is immediate; Asa's impressive burial service is inconsistent with Japhet's contention that the Chronicler holds the king to account even after his death.

2.2 *Thematic Difficulties*

In describing Asa's appeal to Ben-hadad of Aram for help against Baasha's siege, the Chronicler both deletes the term שוחד 'bribe' that occurs in the *Vorlage*—which accentuates Asa's negative image—but also states that Asa took gold and silver from “the treasures of the house of the LORD” (2 Chr 16:2) rather than from what was “left in the treasures of the house of the LORD” (1 Kgs 15:18), suggesting that Asa rather than plundering *all* the temple treasure, as intimated in 1 Kings, he only gave Ben-hadad a portion of it.

2.3 *Chronological Difficulties*

In the fifteenth year of Asa's reign, the people assembled in Jerusalem in order to make a covenant with Yahweh, offering numerous sacrifices taken “from the booty that they had brought” (2 Chr 15:11). This arthrous reference appears to relate to the spoil they had taken from the Cushites (2 Chr 14:12)—thus

Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles (Sheffield, 1996); E. Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in The Book of Chronicles* (London, 2006), pp. 20-43, 160-169.

5 See Kelly, *Retribution and Eschatology*, p. 242.

6 *Contra* Knopper's claim that “In Chr's version of Asa's tenure, the appeal to Ben-Hadad is also ultimately ineffective”: G. N. Knoppers, “Treasures Won and Lost: Royal (Mis)appropriations in Kings and Chronicles”, in M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie (eds.), *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (Sheffield, 1999), p. 198.

7 Evans, however, maintains that Hanani's speech also relates to the treasure, see P. S. Evans, “The Function of the Chronicler's Temple Despoliation Notices in Light of Imperial Realities in Yehud”, *JBL* 129 (2010), p. 37.

suggesting that the covenant ceremony was held soon after the war against Zerah. This timeframe is incommensurate with 2 Chr 13:23, which indicates that peace had prevailed in the land for 10 years. If Zerah's invasion occurred in the tenth year of Asa's reign, the sacrifices offered five years later could not have come from the booty taken in this war.

The Chronicler reports that Baasha of Israel laid a siege against Judah in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign. According to 1 Kings, Baasha ruled for 24 years, taking the throne in the third year of Asa's reign (1 Kgs 15:33) and dying in the twenty-sixth year of the latter's rule (1 Kgs 16:8). He thus could not have laid a siege against Asa in the thirty-sixth year of the latter's reign.⁸

2.4 *Inconsistencies*

While Asa is said to have eradicated the high places (2 Chr 14:2), the Chronicler then cites the *Vorlage* (1 Kgs 15:14), according to which the high places were not destroyed (2 Chr 15:17).⁹

The account of the war between Asa and Zerah the Cushite (2 Chr 14:7-14) is inconsistent with the explicit notation that peace prevailed in Judah until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign (2 Chr 15:19).

The beginning of 2 Chronicles 15 records Azariah's speech, in which he expressly calls for repentance and redirection. Dissociated from the textual sequence, this flies in the face of the notation that Asa and the people have already sought Yahweh—and been rewarded for doing so (2 Chr 14:6).

2.5 *Doublets*

A number of details are repeated once or even twice: the destruction of the high places (2 Chr 14:2, 4), the peace with which those who seek Yahweh are rewarded (3-4, 6, 15:15), and the construction project that follows in its wake (14:5, 6).

Asa furthermore reacts to Azariah's pronouncement by implementing a reform, leading the reader to wonder how this is related to those he is said to have carried out at the beginning of his reign (2 Chr 14:2-4).

8 See R. Dillard, "The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method", *JETS* 23 (1980), pp. 213-214; G. Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 17-31.

9 Japhet (*Ideology*, 173) posits that neither statement is logical, the high places only being erected in the days of Jehoram (2 Chr 21:11). I am not convinced that the verse she adduces unambiguously attests that Jehoram was the first to construct these, however.

3 The Scholarly Solutions Proposed

While some of the difficulties cited above have been discussed, others have escaped notice.¹⁰ Here, I shall briefly discuss the various solutions suggested.

3.1 *Chronological Complications*

These having been addressed by most scholars, I shall deal with them first.¹¹ Two principal approaches have been adopted:

- a) Harmonistic approach: This regards the numbers given in both Kings and Chronicles as reliable. In the latter case, however, they relate not to Asa's rise to the throne but to the time at which the kingdom was divided.¹² On this reading, the dating is to be understood as follows: Zerah attacked Asa in the fifteenth year of the latter's reign. In the following year, after many of the citizens of the northern kingdom joined forces with him, Baasha laid a siege against Asa. When Asa appealed to Ben-hadad for help, Hanani rebuked him. Three years later Asa was stricken with a crippling disease, dying in the twenty-first year of his reign.
- b) Theological approach: This holds that the dates/numbers are symbolic (theological) rather than historical, serving the Chronicler's tendency towards portraying Asa as good/bad. They are thus to be treated as *Sondergut*.¹³

Although Japhet developed the second (theological) approach, she argued that the dates/numbers carry a typological significance, the Chronicler exhibiting a fondness for multiples of five: 10 years' peace, the covenant made in the fifteenth year, Asa walking with Yahweh until the thirty-fifth year of his reign.¹⁴

10 For a partial review, see G. Snyman, "'Tis a Vice to Know Him': Reader's Response-Ability and Responsibility in 2 Chronicles 14-16", *Semeia* 77 (1997), pp. 104-106.

11 See Y. Levin, *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah: 2 Chronicles 10-36* (London/New York, 2017), pp. 75-79. To the two noted in the following, he adds Albright's view that the Chronicler's chronology is more reliable than that in Kings and Curtis and Madsen's theory that the year 36 should be amended to 16 or 26: see W. F. Albright, "The Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel", *BASOR* 100 (1945), p. 20; E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Chronicles* (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 387.

12 See E. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, 1965), pp. 57-61; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles (NCBC)* (Grand Rapids, 1982), pp. 256-258. The latter adopts several of Rudolph's conclusions—such as the reform doublet in 2 Chr 14:2-6/15:8-18: see W. Rudolph, "Der Aufbau der Asa-Geschichte (11 Chr 14-16)", *VT* 2 (1952), pp. 367-371.

13 Rudolph, "Der Aufbau der Asa-Geschichte". Dillard notes various flaws in both these approaches, see: Dillard, "The Reign of Asa", pp. 214-215.

14 See S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles (OTL)* (Louisville, 1993), p. 725.

Klein also adopted this view, arguing that the Chronicler was either unconcerned by or unaware of the problematic dating.¹⁵

3.2 *Theological Problems*

According to Japhet, neither of the two wars Asa fought were due to his sin, representing divine trials rather than retribution for disobedience. Passing the first, he failed the second.¹⁶

Despite delivering the temple treasure to Ben-hadad, Dillard argues that his second victory was a consequence of the righteousness he exhibited prior to it.¹⁷

3.3 *Inconsistencies and Doublets*

Analyzing some of these, Rudolph contends that they attest to later interpolations. He adduces this theory to explain, for example, the double account of Asa's reforms, which he attributed to two independent sources rather than a dual set of reforms.¹⁸

According to Knoppers, Azariah's speech was deliberately incorporated into the first, positive delineation of Asa's reign "in order to anticipate Asa's major failings in the second part".¹⁹ Hereby, it was transformed into a cautionary utterance completely unrelated to his deeds in either the present or past.

Various English translations (e.g., KJV and RSV) reconcile the difficulty with respect to the wars Asa fought by reading 2 Chr 15:19 as follows: "And there was no more war *until* the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa". This view has found little support amongst scholars, however.²⁰

4 The Methodology Behind the Resolution of the Problems

The difficulties in the story of Asa in 2 Chronicles—and perhaps any biblical text— can be approached in three ways:

- a) Through diachronic analysis governed by the principle that rather than comprising a single unit the account has been compiled from various

15 R. W. Klein, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary (Hermeneia)* (Minneapolis, 2012), pp. 209-212.

16 Japhet, *Ideology*, pp. 149-155.

17 Dillard, "The Reign of Asa", p. 212.

18 See W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher (HAT)* (Tübingen, 1955), pp. 241-242.

19 See G. N. Knoppers, "Yhwh is not with Israel!: Alliances as a *Topos* in Chronicles", *CBQ* 58 (1996), p. 606.

20 See, for example, Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, p. 272.

sources that, when merged, create inconsistencies and doublets for diverse reasons:

- 1) The author did not resolve the problems already embedded within his sources, thus perpetuating them;²¹
- 2) Although none of the sources are problematic in their own right, when incorporated together they create doublets or inconsistencies—of which the compiler remained unaware;
- 3) The changes and reworking introduced by the compiler in one source unwittingly led to disparities or doublets.

Whichever of these is true in our present case, the editorial work and integration of disparate sources clearly produced doublets and inconsistencies, however these may have arisen. This approach nonetheless leaves some difficulties unresolved—such as the thematic or theological difficulties.

- b) A synchronic analysis of the final literary form and features. On this reading, rather than deriving from the integration or reworking of diverse sources, the doublets and inconsistencies are a function of a deliberate literary unevenness that reflects the way in which the various parts of the story developed.
- c) A diachronic/synchronic analysis.²² While a story may be assumed to have been compiled from various sources, thus accounting for inconsistencies and doublets, it also constitutes a literary artefact in its own right. In the following sections, I shall apply this method to the account of Asa in 2 Chronicles.²³

5 A Diachronic Reading

According to Rudolph, the doublets and inconsistencies in this story evince that it has been constructed out of several sources, its compiler occasionally interpolating various details that are incommensurate with the original plot.²⁴ The premise that the account is comprised of diverse sources fits ill with the

²¹ See Klein, *2 Chronicles*, pp. 209-212.

²² See L. A. Schökel, "Of Methods and Models", in J. A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Salamanca 1983* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 3-13; For a contrary argument, see P. R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 160-169.

²³ Space constraints preventing me from engaging in a full synchronic analysis here, I shall focus on the form and central themes of the text under discussion.

²⁴ Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, p. 241.

characteristically Chronicler's linguistic features that occur throughout, suggesting that the extant text is a result of his own imagination and creativity rather than an amalgam of independent sources. As Japhet contends, however, the sources that lay at his disposal and his reworking of these must be distinguished from one another.²⁵ Even those places that betray the Chronicler's touch are thus not necessarily to be regarded as fabricated.

Once we accept that the text is a composite of sources, we may then proceed to posit that it consists of at least eight components—i.e., the various sources that lay before the Chronicler, including his *Sondergut*. The extant combination of these eight components is the work of the Chronicler, who has imprinted his style upon them:

- a) The *Vorlage* (1 Kgs 15:9-24): 2 Chr 14:1; 15:16-18; 16:1-6, 11, 12a, 13;
- b) The *Sondergut*: 2 Chr 14:3, 6b, 7a_b, 7b_b, 10; 15:1-8a, 19; 16:1b, 7-10, 12b;
- c) A source depicting a reform and construction of the fortified cities: 2 Chr 14:2-3, 5;
- d) Another source describing the same events: 2 Chr 14:4, 6;
- e) A source describing Asa's army: 2 Chr 14:7 (with the exception of 7a_b and 7b_b);
- f) A source describing the war against Zerah the Cushite: 2 Chr 14:8-14 (with the exception of vs. 10), 15:11;
- g) A source giving an account of another reform introduced by Asa and the covenant he made between the people and Yahweh: 2 Chr 15:8b-10, 12-15;
- h) A source relating to Asa's burial ceremony: 2 Chr 16:14.

5.1 *Component a): The Vorlage*

Some portions of the description of Asa's reign undoubtedly derive from the synoptic material in 1 Kgs 15:9-24. Leaving this largely intact, the Chronicler created a framing story to incorporate the two halves of his account.

5.2 *Component b): The Sondergut*

Some of the verses in the unit appear to be the work of the Chronicler himself. Betraying his striking style and tendentious purpose, the fact that these only appear in Chronicles suggests that rather than drawing upon a specific source the Chronicler employed his own ingenuity. four motifs appear to fall within this category:

- 1) The prayers and speeches of which there is no trace in the *Vorlage*.
- 2) Chronological notations that are frequently inconsistent with those in Kings;

²⁵ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, p. 716.

- 3) The phrase 'ה + ש"ד. Typical of the Chronicler's theological vocabulary, this may be assumed to represent his own work.
- 4) Numerical exaggerations, primarily with regard to the size of the army
On the basis of these factors, the following passages appear to come from the Chronicler's own hand:
 - Asa's 580,000-strong fighting force in v. 7 and Zerah's million troops in v. 8
 - Asa's prayer before the battle with Zerah (2 Chr 14:10)
 - The speeches given by the prophets: Azariah (2 Chr 15:1-8a), Hanani's rebuke, and the proclamation of punishment (2 Chr 15:7-10)
 - The chronological details that divide Asa's reign between the first 35 years and onwards (2 Chr 15:19-16:1b)
 - The call to the people to seek God (2 Chr 14:3), Asa's declaration that they heeded his words (2 Chr 14:6b), his injunction that they do so and imposition of the death sentence for disobedience (2 Chr 15:12-13), and consultation of the physicians rather than Yahweh (2 Chr 16:12b).

5.3 *Components c) and d): The Reform and the Construction of the Fortified Cities*

2 Chr 14:2-6, which describe the uprooting of the foreign cultus and establishment of the fortified cities, pose numerous difficulties:

- 1) Dual references to the destruction of the high places (vv. 2, 4), two terms describing the peace that prevailed in Judah depicted twice (vv. 5, 6 and vv. 4, 5), and two accounts of the building of the fortified cities (vv. 5, 6), the seeking of Yahweh (vv. 3, 6), and Asa's address to the people of Judah (vv. 3, 6).²⁶
- 2) While verse 2 merely informs us that the foreign cult was eradicated in general, v. 4 observes that it was uprooted from all the cities of Judah.
- 3) Verse 5 refers to the construction of the fortified cities in the past (ויבן ערי) *contra* v. 6, which opens with a request to build them in the present (נבנה את הערים האלה), only alluding to the accomplishment of the task at its end (ויבנו ויצליחו).
- 4) Verse 4 employs the phrase ותשקט הממלכה, v. 5 ותשקט הארץ.

²⁶ Japhet (*I and II Chronicles*, p. 706) suggests that the dual reference to the removal of the high places relates to two types—those devoted to foreign worship and those dedicated to Yahweh. This theory appears dubious to me in light of the fact that both occur in connection with foreign cults. Although Williamson (*I and 2 Chronicles*, p. 260) also contends that the doublet represents two types of worship, he posits that both were related to foreign cults—incense altars and other forms of foreign worship. I remain unconvinced by this argument.

In light of the above, I suggest that vv. 2-6 in fact blend two separate sources relating to Asa's reform and the establishment of the fortified cities.²⁷ After weaving them together, the Chronicler then added interpolations in his typical style in order to link the reform with seeking Yahweh and the ensuing prosperity.

The following table lays out the proposed sources side by side, the tendentious interpolations I believe to be the Chronicler's own work being set in bold.

Component c): 2 Chr 14:2-3, 5

²He took away the foreign altars and the high places, broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, ³**and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment.**

⁵ He built fortified cities in Judah while the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace

Component d): 2 Chr 14:4, 6

⁴He also removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him

⁶ He said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours **because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side.**" So they built and prospered.

5.4 Component e): Asa's Army

The description of the corps as divided into two units on the basis of their weaponry and geo-tribal origin appears to be reliable, thus suggesting that the Chronicler drew it from his sources.²⁸ The exaggerated claim that Asa had 580,000 troops is, of course, a fabrication of the type of which the Chronicler was fond.

5.5 Component f) The War against Zerah the Cushite

The account of the battle against Zerah is problematic for at least two reasons—its historical verisimilitude and its identification of Zerah the Cushite. Scholars are divided with respect to the first issue. Some maintain that it is a typically Chronicler's invention. Others contend that it reflects his

²⁷ Both these elements are intimated in Kings (15:12, 23); cf. Jer 41:9. It is difficult to determine whether they form a doublet depicting the same reform or represent two separate sources relating to two independent reforms.

²⁸ See M. Kucman, *2 Chronicles* (Olam Hatanach; Tel Aviv, 2002), p. 112 (Hebrew).

time-period. Still others posit that it rests upon an accurate ancient source.²⁹ I am unsure whether the three approaches can be clearly distinguished from one another. The fact that the story is conspicuously tendentious on the one hand yet provides geographical details and identifies Zerah by name on the other makes determination of this question difficult.³⁰ I thus believe that it should be assigned to the class of accounts based upon a historical source, elaborated in accordance with the Chronicler's tendencies and general agenda.

Zerah's identification is also questionable. All the proposed views are conjectural, being related in some way to the first issue—namely, the reliability of the story and the period to which the battle should be dated.³¹

5.6 *Component g): The Reform and Covenant*

This constitutes another source dealing with the reform and the making of the covenant between the people and Yahweh in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. Although the Chronicler links the reform with Azariah's speech, the two cannot have been directly associated. Three factors militate against this account forming a doublet of the reform depicted at the beginning of the story (as per Rudolph):

- i) It includes elements from the kingdom of Israel (2 Chr 15:8b-9) rather than pertaining solely to the Judahites;
- ii) It alludes to acts performed in the temple;³²
- iii) It adduces a covenant and oath, neither of which are mentioned in the two reforms in the opening scene.

The motive behind this reform and the subsequent covenant appears to be the fact that parts of the kingdom of Israel (Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon) have joined forces with Judah (2 Chr 15:9), prompting Asa to renew the reforms he implemented during the first year of his reign fifteen years later. Above all, however, he appears to have felt his subjects' need to recommit themselves to Yahweh after having ignored Abijah's call to return to the worship of the God of Israel.

29 For the former, see P. Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1973), p. 132. For the latter, see L. C. Jonker, "The Cushites in the Chronicler's Version of Asa's Reign: A Secondary Audience in Chronicles?", *OTE* 19 (2006), pp. 868-870. For the latter, see Curtis and Madsen, *Chronicles*, p. 382; Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, pp. 261-262; Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, pp. 709-710.

30 See A. F. Rainey, "The Chronicler and His Sources—Historical and Geographical", in M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund and S. L. McKenzie (eds.), *The Chronicler as Historian* (Sheffield, 1997), p. 57.

31 See the survey in Klein, *2 Chronicles*, pp. 217-219.

32 See T. D. Cudworth, *War in Chronicles: Temple Faithfulness and Israel's Place in the Land* (London, 2016), pp. 120-121.

On close analysis, this source also appears to have undergone extensive reworking, the Chronicler's hand being clearly visible. As we noted above, vv. 12-13, which depict the seeking of Yahweh, appear to have come from his hand, being consistent with the doctrine that informs the books as a whole. Verse 15, which depicts the people's rejoicing after their seeking of their God, might also belong to this group.

The above analysis yields the following chronological scheme: peace prevailed in Israel until the tenth year of Asa's reign in the wake of his religious reform (2 Chr 13:23). In that year, Zerah the Cushite attacked Judah and was routed. Asa's resounding victory led many from the northern kingdom to move to Judah, a migration that may have continued for five years. Five years later, during the fifteenth year of his reign, Asa introduced another reform, prompted by the influx from Israel (2 Chr 15:9). This mass migration led Baasha, King of Israel, to lay siege to the cities of Judah in the sixteenth year of Asa's reign—designed first and foremost to forestall any more population transfers: “to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of King Asa of Judah (לבלתי תת יוצא ובה לאסא מלך יהודה)” (2 Chr 16:1). On this reading, neither the thirty-fifth nor thirty-sixth years of Asa's reign are accurate dates, the Chronicler possibly seeking to “stretch” the prosperity Judah enjoyed under Asa due to his reforms. Asa's legs were stricken with disease in the thirty-ninth year of his reign in consequence of his inquiring of the physicians, his death occurring in the forty-first year of his reign.

If the reference to the fifteenth year of his reign is historically reliable, 2 Chr 15:11 appears to hang in midair, dealing with the offering of sacrifices taken from the spoils of war against Zerah the Cushite fought five years earlier (2 Chr 14:12). Verse 11 must therefore belong to the end of the war against Zerah rather than to the making of the covenant.³³

5.7 *Component h): The Burial Ceremony*

The impressive burial Asa receives creates difficulties for those who argue that the Chronicler's doctrine of retribution leads him to call the kings to account after their death. According to the Chronicler, for example, Jehoram was not buried in accordance with his status because he was a wicked monarch (2 Chr 21:19). Leaving this discussion aside momentarily, I suggest that the burial sources that lay at the Chronicler's disposal included an account of the burial ceremonies of the kings of Judah, during (all/some of) which incense was offered. He may have altered the description of Jehoram he found therein when he sought to malign the king after his death. With respect to Asa, he

33 According to Williamson (*1 and 2 Chronicles*, p. 271), this verse is out of place, thus being a later interpolation.

appears to have preferred to quote the source before him because of his great esteem for the reforms this ruler introduced, which in his opinion outweighed the negative aspects of his later years.

In summary, the above analysis thus evinces that the story of Asa consists of at least eight components, four of which deal with religious reforms. The most common motif is the uprooting of the foreign cultus, which recurs in virtually every set of reforms—closely followed by the seeking of Yahweh, which appears in three of the reforms. The customary consequence is peace and tranquility (three reforms). The combination of these eight components—one of which is the Chronicler's *Sondergut*—almost certainly gave rise to the inconsistencies and doublets.

Diachronic analysis does not resolve the theological problems in the text, however. These call for a synchronic analysis of the unit as a whole in the light of its immediate context.

6 A synchronic Reading

This comprises two stages, the first of which addresses the extant literary form of the text, the second placing this in its immediate context.

6.1 *The Form of the Description of Asa's Reign*

According to the diachronic analysis conducted above, the Chronicler highlights the reforms Asa implemented during his reign. In doing so, he makes use of at least four sources dealing with this motif. In my opinion, two others central themes can be ascertained in the story—the war and the prophet's speech. These three motifs recur twice in the passage in a fixed order, each producing an outcome that, while similar, also differs in nature. The following diagram illustrates the three motifs and the events to which they lead.

- A Reform (2 Chr 14:2-6) → reward: peace and construction
- B War (2 Chr 14:7-14) → victory: Asa puts his trust in Yahweh
- C Prophetic utterance (2 Chr 15:1-7) → the king acts well: reform
- A' Reform (2 Chr 15:8-18) → reward: peace
- B' War (2 Chr 15:19-16:6) → victory: Asa puts his trust in the king of Aram
- C' Prophetic utterance (2 Chr 16:7-10) → the king's improper conduct: the prophet's imprisonment³⁴

³⁴ Steins offers another chiasmic structure, at the heart of which lies the covenant, see J. Steins, "Sinaibund und Wochenfest: Ein neuer Blick auf 2 Chronik 14-16", in C. Dohmen

The story contains two lengthy descriptions of the reforms (2 Chr 14:2-6 and 15:8-18), the central themes in both being the destruction of the foreign cult worship and the seeking of Yahweh. Both reforms produce positive consequences—the first, peace and the establishment of the fortified cities, the second tranquility. Two wars also take place, Asa being victorious in both (2 Chr 14:7-14 and 15:19-16:6). The difference between them lies in the cause of victory: the first is won due to Yahweh's aid, the second because of the king of Aram's assistance. Two prophets also make speeches, the king immediately taking action in their wake (2 Chr 15:1-7 and 16:7-10). On the first occasion, Asa conducts himself befittingly, strengthening himself and uprooting the centres of foreign worship; on the second, he acts improperly, jailing the prophet.

These three motifs, which recur in a set order, divide the story into two sections that do not match the customary scholarly division, reflected in the text itself—i.e., before and after the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign. According to this chronological scheme, peace and war serve to bridge the two halves: up until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign there was peace in the land; in that year, war broke out. On the present reading, in contrast, the two parts are linked by the prophets' speeches and the reforms. The latter stand at the head of both units, the former concluding each segment. I believe that a better understanding of the significance of this structure can only be achieved in the light of the adjacent stories of Rehoboam, Abijah, and Jehoshaphat. Let us now examine these passages to determine whether they are linked to the account of Asa's reign and/or contain the three motifs central to this story.

6.2 *Rehoboam, Abijah, and Jehoshaphat*

To date, very few associations between Asa, Rehoboam, Abijah, and Jehoshaphat have been noted. While some scholars have adduced a number between Rehoboam and Abijah, Abijah and Asa, and Asa and Jehoshaphat, no broad picture of the relations between all four has yet been painted.³⁵

Allen identifies a number of "kerygmatic units" in Chronicles each of which contain a rhetorical message expressed via recurrent motifs.³⁶ He delineates the narrative sequence relating to Abijah-Asa on the basis of the root אשע , employed only in the accounts of these two kings. Dillard argues that Asa's reign served as a paradigm for the account of Jehoshaphat's days.³⁷

and C. Frevel (eds.), *Für immer verbündet: Studien zur Bundestheologie der Bibel, Festschrift für F. L. Hossfeld* (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 239-248.

35 See Klein's brief discussion ("The Chronicler's Code", n. 39), however.

36 L. C. Allen, "Kerygmatic Units in 1 & 2 Chronicles", *JSOT* 41 (1988), p. 29.

37 R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (*wbc*; Waco, 1987), p. 131; cf. S. J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (*FOTL*; Grand Rapids, 1989), pp. 308-309; *contra* G. N. Knoppers, "Reform and Regression: The Chronicler's Presentation of Jehoshaphat", *Bib* 72 (1991), p. 500.

The following table presents an extensive list of the linguistic and thematic affinities between the descriptions of the first four kings of Judah:

Motif	Rehoboam	Abijah	Asa	Jehoshaphat
Construction of fortified cities	2 Chr 11:5-12		2 Chr 14:5-6	2 Chr 17:2
Cultic reform			2 Chr 14:2, 4; 15:8-18	2 Chr 17:6
Capture of the cities	(2 Chr 12:4)	2 Chr 13:19	2 Chr 16:6	2 Chr 17:2
Marriages	2 Chr 11:18-23	2 Chr 13:21		2 Chr 18:1
Large army ^a	2 Chr 11:1	2 Chr 13:3-20	2 Chr 14:7-8	2 Chr 17:14-18
War	2 Chr 11:1; 12:2	2 Chr 13:3-20	2 Chr 14:8-14; 16:1-6	2 Chr 20:22-23
Defeat of the enemy		2 Chr 13:15-20	2 Chr 14:11-14	2 Chr 20:22-23
The prophet's speech	2 Chr 11:4; 12:5	2 Chr 13:4-12 ^b	2 Chr 15:1-7; 16:7-10	2 Chr 18:18-23; 19:2-3; 20:37
Fear of surrounding nations and peace with enemies			2 Chr 13:23; 14:4, 5, 6, 13	2 Chr 17:10; 20:29-30
Obedience to the Torah	2 Chr 12:1		2 Chr 14:3; 15:3	2 Chr 17:9
Cultic obedience (temple)	2 Chr 11:16; 12:11	2 Chr 13:10-11	2 Chr 15:8, 18; 16:2	2 Chr 20:5, 8-9, 28
"Set his heart"/ "true heart"	2 Chr 12:14		2 Chr 15:17	2 Chr 19:3
Taking spoil			2 Chr 15:17	2 Chr 19:3
National rejoicing			2 Chr 15:15	2 Chr 20:27
Migration to Judah	2 Chr 11:1-16		2 Chr 15:9	
Appeal for help from Yahweh to fight the war	(2 Chr 12:6)	2 Chr 13:5-12	2 Chr 14:10	2 Chr 18:31; 20:5-14, 20
Use of trumpets		2 Chr 13:12, 14	2 Chr 15:14	2 Chr 20:28
Choice of successors during incumbent's reign	2 Chr 11:22			2 Chr 21:3

TABLE (cont.)

Motif	Rehoboam	Abijah	Asa	Jehoshaphat
The king “took counsel”	2 Chr 10:6			2 Chr 20:21
“Conditions were good”	2 Chr 12:12			2 Chr 19:3

- a Klein (“The Chronicler’s Code”) has recently demonstrated that the link between these four kings finds striking expression in the data relating to the size of the royal armies: Rehoboam’s 180,000 troops, Abijah’s 400,000, Asa’s 580,000, and Jehoshaphat’s 1,160,000. Asa’s forces thus total Rehoboam and Abijah’s together, Jehoshaphat’s matching the total of the three others.
- b Some scholars attribute prophetic elements to Abijah’s speech: see J. D. Newsome, “Toward a New Understanding of the Chronicler and his Purposes”, *JBL* 94 (1975), p. 203.

Although this table evinces motifs associated with all four kings are rare, I suggest that taking a broad view of the elements supports the contention that the first four monarchs of Judah following the division of the kingdom are linked to one another.

Let us now reexamine the three motifs that occur in the story of Asa’s reign—reform, war, and prophetic utterance.

7 Reform

The only two kings to institute reforms are Asa and Jehoshaphat. Asa focuses primarily upon rooting foreign cults out of the land, the biblical text alluding to his intent in this regard on four occasions. Together with the transfer of this worship to Jerusalem, this act preceded Josiah’s reforms and the unification of the Israelite cultus.³⁸ In the reform Asa enacts in the wake of the prophetic utterance, he again eradicates foreign cults; this time, however, the reform is supplemented by the covenant he makes between the people and Yahweh.

³⁸ In closely connecting Asa’s cultic reforms and the peace that follows in their wake with the command to consolidate the cultus in Deuteronomy (12:1-14), which also deals with cultic reform and peace in the region, the Chronicler makes Asa a greater Deuteronomist than the Deuteronomist himself: see R. Lowry, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* (Sheffield, 1991), p. 197.

While Jehoshaphat's reforms contain similar elements to those of Asa, they also include new ones.³⁹ Introducing religious and legal reforms unprecedented in scale and scope, he sent envoys to all the city of Judah in order to teach the Torah (2 Chr 17:9), even reaching out to the citizens of the northern kingdom to bring them back to Yahweh (2 Chr 19:4), also appointing judges and magistrates across the country.

Analysis of the reforms implemented by these two kings evinces a significant trajectory. Commencing with the elimination of foreign worship, they proceed to inculcate the seeking of Yahweh and obedience to the law and commandments, then restoring the altar, and finally encouraging study of the Torah, performance of the ordinances, and the development of a judicial system (2 Chr 19:10). Hereby, Rehoboam and Abijah differ substantively from Asa and Jehoshaphat, the former not implementing any reforms, the latter making reform a central aspect of their rule.

The tripartite structure of reform, war, and prophetic utterance, moreover—which appears twice in the account of Asa's reign—also occurs twice in that of Jehoshaphat, once with a minor variation, once in an identical formulation:

- A Reform (2 Chr 17:1-19)⁴⁰
 - (Prophetic utterance [2 Chr 18:6-27])⁴¹
 - B War (2 Chr 18:19-21)
 - C Prophetic utterance (2 Chr 19:2-3)
- A' Reform (2 Chr 19:4-11)
 - B' War (2 Chr 20:1-13)
 - C' Prophetic utterance (2 Chr 20:14-21)

The correspondences between these two formulations in the depiction of the reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat, further differentiate these two kings from Rehoboam and Abijah. While the days of the former are characterized by war, reform, and prophetic speech, the latter only witness a prophetic utterance

39 According to Chronicles, two sets of reforms occurred during Jehoshaphat's reign (2 Chr 17:7-9; 19:4-11). Scholars debate whether these in fact refer to one event or whether the first led to the second: see, for example, W. F. Albright, "The Judicial Reform of Jehoshaphat", in D. Frankel (ed.), *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1950), p. 82.

40 Although other motifs accompany the reform—such as the creation of a large army and the construction of fortified cities—the centre of the unit remains the reform: see Knoppers, "Reform and Regression", p. 504.

41 This speech is placed in parentheses because it differs from the other prophetic utterances in Chronicles, Micaiah being summoned rather than initiating a meeting with the king.

and war. Reform is thus conspicuously absent, this fact directly affecting the retribution/reward elements. In Rehoboam and Abijah's reigns, the latter are confined to two: the construction of fortified cities and the begetting of heirs (Rehoboam) and victory in war and progeny (Abijah). In the reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat, in contrast, the retribution component pervades almost every area possible.⁴² This fact attests to the extent to which the Chronicler esteemed those kings who sought to become agents of change over those who accepted the status quo.⁴³ Even if no cultic reform was required in the days of Rehoboam and Abijah, activity designed to inculcate obedience to the Torah could always be encouraged. I am thus inclined to agree with those scholars who believe that, despite the reward Rehoboam received and the positive attitude manifested towards Abijah, neither were in fact good kings, the Chronicler himself refraining from explicitly portraying them as such.⁴⁴

8 War

All the descriptions of the reigns of the four kings contain an account of the hostilities that took place after the division of the kingdom, this element thus recurring seven times. The first and last passages closely resemble one another, forming an *inclusio*: during Rehoboam's reign, there was no war in accordance with Shemaiah the prophet's edict; during Jehoshaphat's, there was no need for war because Yahweh fought on the people's behalf.⁴⁵

Here, too, a striking divergence between Rehoboam/Abijah and Asa/Jehoshaphat is discernible. Under the first two of the post-division kings, only the people or ministers call on Yahweh during the warfare. This move is only alluded to indirectly in the reign of Rehoboam, in the wake of Shemaiah's rebuke: "Then the officers of Israel and the king humbled themselves" (2 Chr 12:6). In other words, the king merely followed the example set by his ministers. During Abijah's battle against Jeroboam, the people play a central role in the victory:

⁴² R. K. Duke, *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler* (Sheffield, 1990), p. 78.

⁴³ Schweitzer also identifies a graduation of sorts in the reigns of the first four kings that builds towards a "crescendo of utopianism" in the days of Jehoshaphat: S. Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* (New York, 2007), pp. 93-99.

⁴⁴ For Abijah, see D. G. DeBoys, "History and Theology in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Abijah", *Bib* 70 (1990), pp. 48-62; *contra* Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, p. 11; Kelly, *Retribution*, p. 96. For Rehoboam, see I. Amar, "The Characterization of Rehoboam and Jeroboam as a Reflection of the Chronicler's View of the Schism", *JHS* (2017).

⁴⁵ For the peculiar character of this war as fought by Yahweh, see G. N. Knoppers, "Jerusalem at War in Chronicles", in R. S. Hess and G. J. Wenham (eds.), *Zion, City of Our God* (Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 64-76.

“They cried out to the LORD” (2 Chr 13:14); “the people of Judah shouted” (15); “the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD” (18). The portraits of Asa and Jehoshaphat, in contrast, highlight their personal appeals to God during the hostilities: “Asa cried to the LORD” (2 Chr 14:10); “Jehoshaphat cried out” (2 Chr 18:31); “Jehoshaphat stood ... and said ...” (2 Chr 20:5-13).

The war motif is accompanied by another theme linked to the semantic field of hostilities—namely, the construction of fortified cities by Rehoboam, Asa, and Jehoshaphat. During Asa’s reign, a series of events led to a rather surprising conclusion: calling upon Yahweh brought about peace, this enabling the establishment of fortified cities designed for defence in time of war, the latter requiring Yahweh’s aid—only granted when the people sought him in the midst of the combat. This intimates a) that calling upon Yahweh does not automatically or necessarily prevent the outbreak of hostilities; b) that fortified cities play no role during the actual combat; and c) that victory rests on crying out to Yahweh during the battle. These three principles ostensibly contravene Japhet’s argument that acting righteously wards off affliction—including war—and assures Yahweh’s assistance if and when the latter breaks out.

The premise that hostilities are always a form of punishment must thus be revised. Rather than the combat itself, the retribution is defeat. According to the Chronicler, war is a routine occurrence—a natural part of relations between those who seek to dominate one another and conquer territory. While it may be triggered by sins and forestalled by righteousness, sooner or later it will break out once again. Deliverance does not come from fortified cities, which do nothing to protect the king and people.⁴⁶ Calling upon Yahweh and trusting him prior to and during the battle itself are the only means of escape and survival.⁴⁷

Asa and Jehoshaphat’s advantage over Rehoboam and Abijah is also evident in the fact that they carry out reforms before the outbreak of war. Reforms possess numerous qualities: they help bring victory over the enemy, giving the king “merit points” to the extent that even when we might expect the Chronicler to malign the royal figure he in fact paints them in grey rather than black, deleting defamatory words from the *Vorlage* in relation to Asa’s gift to Ben-hadad and plundering of the temple treasure even after abandoning Yahweh and turning to others for aid. He also refrains from directly associating

46 On no occasion do the fortified cities help avert war or protect the king and people during the combat. Shishak proceeds to Jerusalem despite them; Zerah the Cushite engages with Asa in spite of them; and the Ammonites and Moabites attack Jehoshaphat despite them.

47 See P. C. Beentjes, “War Narratives in the Book of Chronicles: A New Proposal in Respect of their Function”, *HTS* (2003), pp. 587-596.

the prophet's imprisonment in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign with the disease that cripples him in his thirty-ninth year. Nor does he hold him to account after his death, as he does with other wicked kings.⁴⁸

The link between Jehoshaphat and Ahab being fundamentally negative, Jehoshaphat deserved the same personal punishment during the battle at Ramot Gilead as Ahab had suffered. According to the Chronicler, however, he is delivered, the prophet attributing his escape directly to his reforms: "Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the sacred poles out of the land" (2 Chr 19:3). These examples all evince that the Chronicler greatly admired the reforms introduced in order to eradicate foreign worship from the land—and even more so the attempt to create a covenant-abiding society.⁴⁹

9 The Prophet

The first four post-division kings speak with prophets on eight occasions, seven of these occurring during a battle. With the exception being Micaiah, who is summoned, the prophets all initiate the royal audience. In each case in which the prophet comes to warn the king, the purpose is to avert war; when he seeks to rebuke, the reprimand relates to forsaking Yahweh or turning to a royal peer for help; when the hostilities that have broken out appear to have done so without due cause, the message is one of encouragement, either at the beginning of the battle or at its end; if the king refuses to listen to the prophet, he takes physical and as well as verbal action against him, both Hanani and Micaiah being gaoled.

Even if it is impossible to conclusively determine during which stage of the war the prophet is likely to approach the king, the Chronicler always involves him in the proceedings at some point. As Knoppers observes, his perception of prophecy appears to follow that found in Deuteronomy 18 and constitutes a central tenet of this thought. Serving a Yahweh's envoy, he forms the conduit through which God addresses the people or king: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command"

48 *Contra* D. A. Glatt-Gilad, "Regnal Formulae as a Historiographic Device in the Book of Chronicles", *RB* 108 (2001), p. 204.

49 See Ben Zvi, *Literature and Theology*, pp. 50-53.

(Deut 18:18).⁵⁰ Sent to avert war, explain the circumstances surrounding it, and even to encourage the nation, his voice is thus imperative, tantamount to a divine revelation. By the same token, his silence signals Yahweh's non-intervention—with all the implications this entails (cf. Deut 18:19). Jehoshaphat makes this state of affairs very clear: האמינו בה' אלהיכם ותאמנו האמינו בנביאיו והצליחו (2 Chr 20:20). The key to success thus lies in the prophetic utterance, the people's survival (ותאמנו = 'be firmly established'; cf. Isa 22:23) resting on Yahweh's interposition. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities or during them, the prophet's declaration forms the guarantee that they will end well. Once they have concluded, his utterance—most frequently an admonition of the king—is required in order to prevent the consequences the royal actions during the fighting are likely to bring about.

While the prophet's presence is linked to all four kings, however, in the case of Asa and Jehoshaphat it is also associated with the implementation of a further reform. Following the prophet's words, these two monarchs embark on a radical path of reorganization, not merely eradicating foreign worship as in their initial reforms but also seeking to turn the Judahites—and their northern brethren—back to Yahweh. At the same time as removing all the abominations from the land, Asa also gathers Judah and part of Israel in Jerusalem to rededicate the altar, offering multiple sacrifices upon it and making a covenant between the people and Yahweh. Heeding the prophetic utterance, Jehoshaphat goes to Jerusalem without waiting for the people to do so, thence going out amongst them “from Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim” to bring them back to Yahweh. In order to reinforce this move, he then introduced extensive legal reforms in Jerusalem and across Judah.

The Chronicler's approach is exemplified *par excellence* in Azariah's speech, which adduces historical events and links them to the present: employing the past to teach and instruct his present audience.⁵¹ During this turbulent period, the Chronicler's lifetime, he encourages the political and spiritual leaders of Yehud to act and serve as agents of change—destroying every sign of foreign worship and inculcating obedience to the covenant.

Asa and Jehoshaphat are thus representative of those kings who, unwilling to accept the status quo, initiated far-ranging reforms designed not merely

50 G. N. Knoppers, “‘To Him You Must Listen’: The Prophetic Legislation in Deuteronomy and the Reformation of Classical Tradition in Chronicles”, in P. S. Evans and T. F. Williams (eds.), *Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and Early Second Temple Historiography* (Winona Lake, 2013), pp. 161-194.

51 L. C. Allen, *The First and the Second Books of Chronicles: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections* (NIB; Nashville, 1999), p. 538.

to “turn the people away from evil” by uprooting foreign cults but to prompt them to “do good” by restoring the altar and renewing the covenant (Asa) and reorganizing the judicial system (Jehoshaphat).

Alongside the motif of observing the Torah and eradicating foreign worship from the land, another theme can be ascertained within the stories of Asa and Jehoshaphat—namely, the desire to remove all foreign influence. This covered broad areas, including most prominently religion, the legal system, commerce, and the military. According to the Chronicler, any foreign cultural elements from Yehud’s neighbours (Samaria included, being far more open to such influences than Yehud) was likely to be disastrous—for both those who had remained in the land and those that had come from Babylonia.⁵² The extent of the cultural impact against which he fought is demonstrated by archaeological findings.⁵³ In this context, Jehoshaphat’s legal reform may have been intended to erect a barrier against Persian law and its penetration of Yehud society rather than merely the establishment of a proper judicial paradigm.⁵⁴

For this reason, the important work Asa and Jehoshaphat did in the fields of religion and the legal system failed to help them when they sought aid from a third party. Asa was crippled after appealing to Ben-hadad for assistance. The covenant he made between the people and Yahweh (“They entered into a covenant [ברית] to seek the LORD” [2 Chr 15:12]) was replaced by his

52 For the cultural divergences between Yehud and Samaria, see I. Cornelius, “A Tale of Two Cities: The Visual Imagery of Yehud and Samaria, and Identity/ Self-Understanding in Persian Palestine”, in L. C. Jonker (ed.), *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (Tübingen, 2011), p. 227. For a comprehensive survey of the relations between Yehud and her neighbours, see L. C. Jonker, *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles* (Tübingen, 2016), pp. 95-106.

53 See G. N. Knoppers, “Greek Historiography and the Chronicler’s History: A Reexamination”, *JBL* 122 (2003), pp. 648-650. The Chronicler’s efforts may have succeeded, archaeological surveys evincing that while foreign cults were widespread towards the end of the monarchy, they were “purged” during the Persian period: see E. Stern, “The Religious Revolution in Persian-Period Judah”, in O. Lipshits and M. Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, 2006), pp. 199-205. For contrary views, see C. Frevel et al. (eds.), *A “Religious Revolution” in Yehud? The Material Culture of the Persian Period as a Test Case* (Freiburg, 2014). The contributors to this volume question not only Stern’s methodology but also the simplistic way in which he presents it, arguing that he fails to take into account the historical, demographic, social, economic, and religious features of the Persian period: see the summary on pp. 17-19.

54 *Contra* G. N. Knoppers, “Jehoshaphat’s Judiciary and ‘The Scroll of YHWH’s Torah’”, *JBL* 113 (1994), pp. 79-80; for those in Yehud who might have wished to adopt the Persian pattern, see Jonker, *Defining All-Israel*, pp. 145-146.

treaty with Ben-hadad (“Let there be an alliance [ברית] between me and you” [2 Chr 16:3]). Asa then transgresses yet again, turning to the physicians for succour—possibly not local but foreign whose healing derived from their own gods (cf. 1 Kgs 1:2) rather than Yahweh, thereby preventing him from being healed like Hezekiah (2 Chr 32:24).⁵⁵ Jehoshaphat was similarly punished for seeking to trade with Ahaziah, King of Israel, his ships being destroyed and failing to reach Tarshish from Geber Ezion. According to the Chronicler, alliances with third parties were thus only effective if Yahweh was recognized as sovereign over them—as in the case of Hiram (2 Chr 2:11) and the Queen of Sheba (2 Chr 9:8).⁵⁶

10 Conclusion

The numerous difficulties in the story of Asa undoubtedly contribute to its complexity and the multifaceted portrait of Asa. Herein, I have sought to reconcile many of the problems by employing both diachronic and synchronic analyses. The former accounts for several of the inconsistencies, doublets, and chronological issues; the latter addresses the theological and thematic aporias.

The nature of Asa’s reign appears to be elucidated by those of his predecessors and successors—Rehoboam/Abijah and Jehoshaphat. Asa’s and Jehoshaphat’s days are characterized by reform, war, and a prophetic utterance (× 2). This paradigm is a developmental variation on the earlier simple pattern that typifies Abijah and Rehoboam’s reigns, the latter only containing two elements—war and a prophetic speech. Asa and Jehoshaphat thus represent a new kind of king: rather than resting on their laurels, they actively seek to change the cultic, religious, and legal customs practiced in Judah and even parts of the northern kingdom. The desire for change and that actually implemented stand in their favour, on occasion even mitigating the criticism levelled against them when they conducted themselves improperly. Only when Asa and Jehoshaphat turn to a third party—for medical or military assistance (Asa) or commercial and trading ties (Jehoshaphat)—are they punished.

In the face of the various challenges the Persian period posed to the residents of Yehud, the Chronicler expected two things of the leadership: a) the

⁵⁵ Cf. Gen 20:17; Num 12:13; 2 Kgs 20:8; et al.

⁵⁶ This fact explains why maritime trade flourished between Solomon and Hiram (2 Chr 9:21) but not between Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah. Cf. Knoppers, “Alliances as a Topos in Chronicles”, pp. 622-626.

introduction of religious and legal reforms rather than acceptance of the existing situation; b) removal of the threat foreign cultural influence constituted to the country's religious and political stability.

Acknowledgment

This article was funded by a research grant from Hemdat Ha'darom Academic College. I would like to express my gratitude to the college for its generosity.