

When did Baasha die?

In what year of King Asa's reign did Baasha, King of Israel die?

- (a) Twenty-sixth year (I Kings 15:33 - 16:8)
- (b) Still alive in the thirty-sixth year (2 Chronicles 16:1)

Shabir Ally asks, “In what year of King Asa’s reign did Baasha, King of Israel die?”¹

1Ki 15:33 KJV

(33) In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years.

1Ki 16:6, 8 KJV

(6) So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead.

(8) **In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah** began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years.

Our Short Answer: Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of King Asa, at which time his son Elah officially reigned in his stead. 2 Chronicles 16:1-10 relates when Hanani the seer went to speak to King Asa in the 36th year of his reign, but only references King Baasha to describe the historical backdrop of that event.

2Ch 15:19 KJV

(19) And there was no *more* war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.

2Ch 16:1, 7, 12-13 KJV

(1) **In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa ...**

(7) **And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah,** and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.

(12) And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease *was* exceeding *great*: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.

(13) And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.

The Chronicles account was not intended to dispute the lifespan of King Baasha, but describes important events in the 35th, 36th, 39th, and 41st years of Asa.

¹, “101 Clear Contradictions in the Bible”, Shabir Ally, Al-Attique Int’l Islamic Publications, <http://www.islamway.com/english/images/library/contradictions.htm>

Our Long Answer: Although many of Shabir Ally’s contested “contradictions” may seem silly or trivial, this particular question seems to have plagued modern theologians and bible commentators for some time. I believe this has been caused by a verse-at-a-time approach which limits the perceived passage to appear thus:

2Ch 16:1 KJV

(1) **In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa** Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

The impatient reader stops reading at verse one and concludes that the intent of the passage is to inform us when Baasha came up against Judah. Because the account of 1 Kings is very clear that Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa, this seems to have become a very confusing passage for many readers.

I have observed two different approaches for this particular problem.

Approach One: Could This Be Scribal Error?

Some have claimed that this must be a clear example of a scribal error. Supposedly the place that reads “In the six and thirtieth year” must have originally contained a different number. This proposed solution receives criticism from bible skeptics and defenders alike.

There are no Hebrew manuscripts containing any alternative readings of the passage of 1 Chronicles 16:1 that would lend credence to this theory. From the perspective of manuscript evidence, this reading is unchallenged.

Besides the special care taken in the transmission of the underlying Masoretic Hebrew text, the “scribal error” theory is compounded by the problem that it would require two simultaneous “scribal errors” to account for the preceding verse in 2 Chronicles 15:19, concerning the 35th year of King Asa.

2Ch 15:19 KJV

(19) And there was no *more* war **unto the five and thirtieth year** of the reign of Asa.

2Ch 16:1 KJV

(1) **In the six and thirtieth year** of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

The latter event of 2 Chronicles 16:1 is clearly meant to follow in the wake of the 35th year described in 2 Chronicles 15:19. The ordering of these verses makes the “scribal error” theory seem extremely unlikely, and even to appear as a “strained”

explanation. The more discerning bible skeptics are usually unsatisfied with such an explanation, and so are we.

Approach Two: Is this really the 36th year of King Asa?

Another claim that I have seen is that the Hebrew word translated “reign” in 1 Chronicles 16:1 should have been translated as “kingdom.” The explanation then follows that the 36th year of the kingdom of Asa should be counted from king Rehoboam, which would render this as the literal 16th year of King Asa, during which time Baasha was still reigning in Israel.

This explanation has many problems of its own. First, this theory seems rather strained within our considered context, because it uses the exact same word in 2 Chronicles 16:12.

2Ch 16:12-13 KJV

- (12) **And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign** was diseased in his feet, until his disease *was* exceeding *great*: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.
- (13) And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.

If the “counting from the reign of King Rehoboam” theory were correct, then this would also mean that Asa was actually diseased in his feet in the 19th year of his own literal reign. This would also seem rather inconsistent. Why would the author switch back and forth from one style of reckoning the timing of events to the other?

Second, I am not aware of any existing English translation that has been willing to translate this passage in such a fashion. Such a translation would be without precedent.

Third, we have many examples where this same Hebrew word “malchooth” (Strong’s reference H4438) is used to describe the reign of a king where it does not seem to imply anything other than the literal reigning year of the actual king. Examples include: 2Ch 3:2, 2Ch 35:19, Ezc 4:5, Ezc 4:6, Est 2:16, Jer 49:34, Jer 52:31, Dan 1:1, Dan 2:1, and Dan 8:1.

2Ch 3:1-2 KJV

- (1) Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where *the LORD* appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.
- (2) And he began to build in the second *day* of the second month, **in the fourth year of his reign.**

Can we possibly interpret 2 Chronicles 3:1-2 to mean that Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of the kingdom of David over the twelve tribes of Israel? That would indeed be an obvious contradiction.

Thus we conclude that this proposed solution simply does not work. It would require that for some reason, in this instance and only in this instance that “the reign of king Asa” must really mean “from the reign of the kingdom of Judah” meaning “the reign of king Rehoboam.”

Our Reading of the Text

Because of the preceding occurrence of “the five and thirtieth year of king Asa” in 2 Chronicles 15:19, there is no “easy out” even for one who is eager for an excuse of “scribal error,” and the “translation error” theory is not supported by any English translation and can actually be disproved.

So other than throwing up our hands and saying that the text is mysterious and cannot be understood, what is going on here? Perhaps the bible commentators have simply been asking the wrong question all this time. Solutions like these are usually very simple once they are actually seen.

For example, consider the length of time that these events might require:

1. Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.
2. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Benhadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying,

There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.

3. And Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelmaim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.
4. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *it*, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease.
5. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

Clearly these events began during the reign of King Baasha, but the resulting after effects would have carried on for years. After Syria was bribed to betray their

former alliance with Israel, they continued to war against them for many years over the reigns of several different kings. Because Israel was distracted with foreign enemies for this extended period of time Asa was able to take the materials from Ramah, and build Geba and Mizpah in their stead.

There is a saying that “Rome was not built in a day.” Geba and Mizpah were probably built over multiple years, and the Syrian aggression against Israel continued long after the kingdom of Israel had passed from the line of Baasha. However, these events that were described are essential to understanding why Asa had peace until his 35th year (as we are reminded in 2 Chronicles 15:19).

- We do not know when King Baasha came up against Ramah,
- We do not know exactly when King Asa forged an alliance with Syria,
- We do not know when Ramah was officially looted for raw materials,
- We do not know when Asa finished building Geba and Mizpah.

We can safely assume that none of these events were initiated and completed in the 36th year of King Asa. But with this historical perspective in mind, now the following section makes perfect sense.

6. **And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah,** and said unto him,

Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

7. **Then Asa was wroth with the seer,** and put him in a prison house; for *he was* in a rage with him because of this *thing*. **And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time.**

It should be obvious that the Chronicles account is not trying to tell us that Asa hired the entire Syrian army to fight a ghost army led by a spectral king Baasha. The history of verses 2 Chronicles 16:1-6 constitute a very large parenthetical statement that must be understood in the context of what it is about to tell us about the 36th year of King Asa.

In the 36th year, Hanani spoke to king Asa and told him why his peace had been brought to an end, the king became wroth and threw him into a prison house, and began to oppress the people at the same time. None of this would make sense without the previous parenthetical statement.

Is This a Reasonable Explanation?

The Hebrew text itself was not originally divided by chapters and verse markings. These were later added for convenience, and complete thoughts and phrases often span multiple verses. And although the Hebrew text obviously employs parenthetical phrasing from time to time, it did not contain parentheses marks. Phrasing is expected to be understood from context.

Additionally, the Bible often departs from a strictly chronological sequence to supply historical context. This can be observed in the earliest chapters of Genesis.

Gen 2:3-5 KJV

- (3) **And God blessed the seventh day**, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.
- (4) These *are* the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,
- (5) And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, **and *there was not a man to till the ground.***

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that man was created on the sixth day, and then it proceeds to the seventh day. Within two verses it tells us that there was not a man to till the ground. This is another example of how parenthetical statements can skip backwards chronologically. They are meant to be interpreted with context. I would also use a simple example from the book of 1 Kings:

1Ki 15:24-25 KJV

- (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 stead.
- (25) And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel **in the second year of Asa king of Judah**, and reigned over Israel two years.

1 Kings 15:5-24 is a large parenthetical statement that is not meant to be interpreted as having completed before 1 Kings 15:25.

Granting that parenthetical statements are used within the biblical text, the book of Chronicles speaks from the perspective of the nation of Judah. The important event being described concerns why Judah would again be subjected to wars, and the oppression of the people at the same time.

Our explanation agrees with the preserved Hebrew text, and does not attempt to retranslate the English. It is a matter of where one chooses to place the *emphasis* of the phrase “In the sixth and thirtieth year of King Asa” which renders a meaning that seems entirely consistent with the thrust of the passage in full.

Summary

During his reign, King Baasha came up against Asa and started to build Ramah. Asa sought an alliance with the king of Syria to apply foreign military pressure so that Baasha would leave off of his work. Under Asa's direction, Ramah was torn down and two other cities were built in their stead.

This foreign policy seemed to grant Asa's reign with peace that lasted until his 35th year. But because of these former events and Asa's continued reliance upon Syria for aid and protection, in the 36th year God sent his prophet Hanani to explain why he would now have wars from henceforth.

2Ch 16:7-13 KJV

- (7) **And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah**, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.
- (8) Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand.
- (9) For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.
- (10) Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for *he was* in a rage with him because of this *thing*. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people the same time.
- (11) And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they *are* written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.
- (12) **And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet**, until his disease *was* exceeding *great*: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.
- (13) **And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.**

In the thirty-sixth year Hanani came to king Asa of Judah. There is no need to suppose that Baasha had come back to life in the thirty-sixth year of king Asa, especially considering that the author of Chronicles specifically states that we are expected to be familiar with the book of Kings (note 2Ch 16:11).

We can understand why this may have seemed confusing, but it does not require an explanation of contradiction or an error in the Hebrew text.

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Appendix A: 2 Chronicles 16:1-10

I thought it might help to illustrate that the original Hebrew text does not contain punctuation marks or parentheses. Thus this is not so much an issue having to do with the original text itself, but is a matter of interpretation.

Reading from right to left,

2Ch 16:1-10 HOT

בשנת שלשים וּשש למלכות אסא עלה בעשא מלך־ישראל על־יהודה
ויבן את־הרמה לבלתי תת יוצא ובא לאסא מלך יהודה ויצא אסא כסף
וזהב מאצרות בית יהוה ובית המלך וישלח אל־בן־הוד מלך ארם היושב
בדרמשק לאמר ברית ביני ובינך ובין אבי ובין אביך הנה שלחתי לך
כסף וזהב לך הפר בריתך את־בעשא מלך ישראל ויעלה מעלי וישמע בן
הוד אל־המלך אסא וישלח את־שרי החילים אשר־לו אל־ערי ישראל
ויכו את־עיון ואת־דן ואת אבל מים ואת כל־מסכנות ערי נפתלי ויהי
כשמע בעשא ויחדל מבנות את־הרמה וישבת את־מלאכתו ואסא המלך
לקח את־כל־יהודה וישאו את־אבני הרמה את־עציה אשר בנה בעשא
ויבן בהם את־גבע ואת־המצפה ובעת ההיא בא חנני הראה אל־אסא מלך
יהודה ויאמר אליו בהשענך על־מלך ארם ולא נשענת על־יהוה אלהיך
על־כן נמלט חיל מלך־ארם מידך הלא הכושים והלזבים היו לחיל לרב
לרכב ולפרשים להרבה מאד ובהשענך על־יהוה נתנם בידך כי יהוה
עיניו משטטות בכל־הארץ להתחזק עם־לבכם שלם אליו נסכלת על־זאת
כי מעתה יש עמך מלחמות ויכעס אסא אל־הראה ויתנהו בית המהפכת
כי־בזעף עמו על־זאת וירצין אסא מן־העם בעת ההיא

The correct phrasing of a passage must be interpreted according to context. This is how this same passage would look in the King James without verse divisions, but with coloring added for emphasis.

(2Ch 16:1-10 KJV)

In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Benhadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, *There is* a league between me and thee, as *there was* between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. And Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelmaim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *it*, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah. **And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for *he was* in a rage with him because of this *thing*. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people the same time.**

* * *

It is my understanding that the entire section represented by dark grey text above is a large parenthetical statement that was intended to introduce the event that occurred in the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.

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