



Second Kings - Chapter Sixteen

VII 2 Kings 15:32-16:20 - Jotham and Ahaz (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Sixteen

Despite the troubles that had plagued the northern kingdom of Israel, the new king of Judah, Ahaz, followed in their idolatrous ways and the nation suffered because of it. The Edomites rebelled and took land away for Judah. The Syro-Ephraimite War intensified so that Ahaz had to call on the king of Assyria to come to his aid against Aram and Israel, paying him tribute to do so.

When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus and he sent a description of it to the priest Uriah, ordering him to have one made and placed in the temple instead of the altar that was there. When Ahaz returned to Jerusalem he made offerings upon the new altar and ordered the priest to continue using the new pagan one.

Following this he desecrated the temple according to the wishes of the king of Assyria. Thus his sixteen year reign was a reversal of those kings that had gone before him. When he died his son Hezekiah succeeded him and would be a much better king, turning the people back to the Lord.

VII.b 2 Kings 16:1-20 - Ahaz Reigns over Judah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, King Ahaz son of Jotham of Judah began to reign. ² Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his ancestor David had done, ³ but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable

practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴ He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

2 Kings 16:1-4

In the seventeenth year of Pekah was 735 BC.

He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God. This briefly describes the reign of perhaps the worst king of Judah. Whereas many previous kings fell short in some area or another, typically allowing sacrifice on the high places, of Ahaz it is simply said that he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord. With Jotham's son Ahaz, Judah returns to officially sanctioned idolatry as the high places become centres of Canaanite religion: *<<For they also built for themselves high places, pillars, and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; there were also male temple prostitutes in the land. They committed all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel>>* (1 Kings 14:23-24). This religion includes child sacrifice to the god Molech for Ahaz made his son pass through fire, in other words he burned his son as an offering; refer to 1 Kings 11:7 and 16:34.

Confirmation for the rule of Ahaz has come from the discovery of a bulla or clay seal with the inscription, 'Belonging to Ahaz [son of] Yehotam [Jotham], king of Judah.' Refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 18:1.

As his ancestor David had done. Ahaz had plenty of good examples, both immediately in his father Jotham and historically in his ancestor David. Ahaz rejected these godly examples and walked in his own way - a way opposed to God.

But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. Ahaz not only rejected the godly heritage of David, he embraced the ungodly ways of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah had a mixture of godly and ungodly kings; the northern kingdom of Judah had only ungodly kings, and Ahaz followed their pattern. This is the first instance where Judah imitates Israel's apostasy. Micah 7:2-7 is a good description of the depravity of the times of Ahaz and the reaction of the godly remnant to it.

Ahaz made his son pass through fire. This describes Ahaz's participation in the worship of Molech. The pagan god or, more accurately demon Molech was worshipped by heating a metal statue representing the god until it was red hot, then placing a living infant on the outstretched hands of the statue, while beating drums drowned out the screams of the child until it burned to death. In Leviticus 20:1-5, God pronounced the death sentence against all who worshipped Molech, saying: *<<I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name>>* (Leviticus 20:3). Sadly, even a man as

great as Solomon at least sanctioned the worship of Molech and built a temple to this idol recorded in 1 Kings 11:7. One of the great crimes of the northern tribes of Israel was their worship of Molech, leading to the Assyrian captivity: <<***They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury; and they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger***>> (2 Kings 17:17). King Manasseh of Judah gave his son to Molech: <<***He made his son pass through fire; he practised soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger***>> (2 Kings 21:6). Up to the days of King Josiah of Judah, Molech worship continued, because he destroyed a place of worship to that idol: <<***He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom, so that no one would make a son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech***>> (2 Kings 23:10).

According to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. The nations that occupied Canaan before the time of Joshua also practiced this terrible form of human and child sacrifice. God would bring judgement upon Judah for their continued practice of these sins. This is a reminder that the war against the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua - as terrible and complete as it was - it was not a racial war. God's judgement did not come upon the Canaanites through the armies of Israel because of their race, but because of their sin. If Israel insisted in walking in the same sins, God would bring similar judgement upon them.

⁵ Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem; they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. ⁶ At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom, and drove the Judæans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day.

2 Kings 16:5-6

Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem. This was part of Pekah's anti-Assyria policy. He thought that with Judah defeated, Aram and Israel together could more effectively resist the resurgent power of the Assyrian Empire. The Isaiah Chapter 7 passage makes it clear that the goal of this attack was to dethrone Ahaz and set up an Aramæan king over Judah, a certain son of Tabeal: <<***Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it***>> (Isaiah 7:6).

On the whole, Judah suffered terrible losses from this attack. King Ahaz lost 120,000 Judæan soldiers and 200,000 civilian hostages in these battles with Israel and Aram according to 2 Chronicles 28:5-8. It was dark time for Judah, and it looked as if the dynasty of David would soon be extinguished, as so many

dynasties in the northern kingdom of Israel had ended. When this great number of captives was taken to Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, a strange and wonderful thing happened. A prophet named Oded rebuked the army managing the captives, and called on them to return them to Judah. These leaders in Israel responded, realising that they had already offended the Lord and risked offending him even further. So they clothed and fed the captives, who had before this been treated terribly, and returned them to Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 28:8-15.

They besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. The combined armies of Aram and Israel were strong enough to capture many cities in Judah, but not strong enough to defeat Jerusalem and overthrow the government of Ahaz.

The prophecy of Isaiah Chapter 7, including the announcement of the Immanuel sign, came from Isaiah to King Ahaz during this joint Israel-Aramæan invasion. As the following verses reveal, Ahaz refused to trust in the Lord and instead put his trust in the king of Assyria. Yet for the sake of David, God did not allow this disastrous attack on Judah to prevail. He would not allow this satanic plot against the Messianic dynasty of David to succeed. The kings of Israel and Aram thought of themselves as burning torches, come to destroy Judah and the dynasty of David. God said they were just like burnt-out smoking sticks, who would not ultimately do much damage; refer to Isaiah 7:4.

Through Isaiah's message to Ahaz, he assured the wicked king, who did not really listen, here should be a remnant left to return to the land; and the virgin should bear a son, so there should not fail to be a king upon the throne of David. The dynasty could never be destroyed, for of Immanuel's kingdom there shall be no end: *<<As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed>>* (Daniel 7:13-14).

The king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom. This town had only recently been won back for Judah by Azariah (2 Kings 14:22). It seems that Rezin briefly re-establishes Aramæan control over the entirety of the King's Highway in Transjordan from Damascus to Elath, and surrenders Elath to the Edomites, who appear to have taken part as allies, along with the Philistines, in the assault on Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 28:17-18.

⁷ Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, saying, 'I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.'⁸ Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the house

of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. ⁹ The king of Assyria listened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir; then he killed Rezin.

2 Kings 16:7-9

Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. Before Ahaz did this, Isaiah offered him a sign for assurance of God's help in the struggle against the combined armies of Israel and Aram; refer to Isaiah 7:1-12. This was a fair offer to a foul sinner, but Ahaz refused under the excuse of not wanting to test God, when instead he really wanted to trust in the king of Assyria.

I am your servant and your son. Rather than turning to the Lord for help, Ahaz accepts vassal status to Assyria and requests his new overlord's help, which arrives in the form of the Assyrian campaigns of 733-732 BC in Aram-Palestine. This resulted in the capture of Damascus and the death of Rezin as well as the annexation of large parts of northern Israel and the death of King Pekah; refer to 2 Kings 15:29-30. Readers can only wonder what blessing might have come if Ahaz had surrendered and sacrificed to the Lord with the same energy and whole heart that he surrendered to the Assyrian king. When anyone appeals to God saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me," then God answers. It is true that the Assyrian king answered and delivered Ahaz; but it was short-lived deliverance. He could have really secured his kingdom permanently by surrendering and sacrificing to God in the same way.

Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. Essentially, Ahaz made Judah a subject kingdom to Assyria. Ahaz now took his orders from the Assyrian king, sacrificing the independence of the kingdom of Judah. The difference between Ahaz and his great ancestor David is so stark: <<***In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears***>> (Psalm 18:6). Even his wicked grandson Manasseh sought the Lord his God when he was in affliction. However, Ahaz seemed determined to fill up the measure of his sins.

Kir was the original home of the people of Aram, located somewhere in Mesopotamia: <<***Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?***>> (Amos 9:7).

¹⁰ When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. King Ahaz sent to the priest Uriah a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. ¹¹ The priest Uriah built the altar; in accordance with all that

King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, just so did the priest Uriah build it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus.

2 Kings 16:10-11

King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser. It was unusual for the kings of Judah to make official visits to other kingdoms; they generally stayed within the borders of the Promised Land or their occupied lands in Transjordan. Yet this was much more than a diplomatic visit - this was an official act of submission from Ahaz to Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria.

The altar that was at Damascus. Having travelled to Damascus to meet his new overlord, Ahaz is so impressed by this Aramæan altar to the god Hadad that he has a copy of it installed in the temple in Jerusalem. Ahaz has strayed far from true faith in the Lord, and his religion is full-fledged syncretism with the pagan religions of the other nations. Using the plans sent from Ahaz, Uriah imitated the pagan altar at Damascus and had it ready by the time Ahaz returned from the Aramæan capital. Ahaz did this both to please his new lord Tiglath-Pileser, and to incorporate the latest trends in altar design into the national worship of Judah. The Chronicler explains why King Ahaz was attracted to the worship he saw in Damascus: <<*For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, which had defeated him, and said, 'Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them so that they may help me.'* But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel>> (2 Chronicles 28:23). This explains why many churches today put their trust in the tools, techniques, and principles of worldly success: they think the gods of Damascus will give them victory!

¹² When the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar, went up on it, ¹³ and offered his burnt-offering and his grain-offering, poured his drink-offering, and dashed the blood of his offerings of well-being against the altar. ¹⁴ The bronze altar that was before the Lord he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of his altar. ¹⁵ King Ahaz commanded the priest Uriah, saying, 'Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt-offering, and the evening grain-offering, and the king's burnt-offering, and his grain-offering, with the burnt-offering of all the people of the land, their grain-offering, and their drink-offering; then dash against it all the blood of the burnt-offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by.' ¹⁶ The priest Uriah did everything that King Ahaz commanded.

2 Kings 16:12-16

Then the king drew near to the altar, went up on it, and offered his burnt-offering and his grain-offering, poured his drink-offering, and dashed the blood of his offerings of well-being against the altar. Ahaz served as a priest at the altar of his own design. Since he created his own place of worship, it also made sense that he would disregard God's command that a king must not serve as a priest; refer to Numbers 18:7. Ahaz's grandfather Azariah/Uzziah dared to enter the temple and serve God as a priest, recorded in 2 Chronicles Chapter 26. Yet at least Azariah falsely worshipped the true God. Ahaz falsely worshipped a false god of his own creation. Azariah for so doing was smitten with leprosy; but Ahaz of a far worse disease, an incurable hardness of heart.

Ahaz wildly experimented, trying to inject the religion of Judah with new life. He seemed to be drawn to the most lurid elements in the pagan religions around him. Like the Athenians who *<<would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new>>* (Acts 17:21b), Ahaz was addicted to the lure of the sensational. The ways of the world should not be brought into the Christian church just because everyone else is doing it and it seems fun or successful in some way.

The old bronze altar of Solomon's temple spoken of in 1 Kings 8:64 is now to be used only for Ahaz to inquire by, i.e. for divination - the interpretation of omens. This probably refers to extispicy, the examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals, focusing on the inspection of the liver (hepatoscopy), in order to divine the will and intentions of the gods. Extispicy is attested in the ancient Near East from early in the Second Millennium BC and played an important role not only at royal courts but also in the everyday life of ordinary people. The god Hadad was central to the practice of divination, along with Shamash the sun god. The practice is forbidden, along with child sacrifice, in Deuteronomy 18:10.

The priest Uriah did everything that King Ahaz commanded. Uriah not only allowed Ahaz to do this; he participated in his evil and idolatrous plans. This was in dramatic contrast to the priests in the days of King Uzziah, who did all they could to restrain the madness of king; refer to 2 Chronicles 26:17-18.

Of course, Ahaz bears the greater blame in this matter; but the high priest Uriah also bore significant blame in the replacement of the Lord's altar with this one of pagan design. Curiously, Isaiah 8:1-2 calls Uriah the priest 'a reliable witness'. Apparently, he was a good and faithful man who later compromised or who acted out of fear for his life perhaps. The corruption of King Ahaz spread to other leaders in Judah.

¹⁷ Then King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands, and removed the laver from them; he removed the sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pediment of stone. ¹⁸ The covered portal for

use on the sabbath that had been built inside the palace, and the outer entrance for the king, he removed from the house of the Lord. He did this because of the king of Assyria.

2 Kings 16:17-18

Then King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands, and removed the laver from them; he removed the sea from the bronze oxen that were under it. The architectural details that follow the information about the frames and the sea, and what Ahaz does about these, are unfortunately obscure. All that seems clear is that his actions are motivated by a desire not to offend the king of Assyria. In doing these things, Ahaz desecrates the furnishings of the temple of the Lord. Obedience to the Lord is gone, the Lord's blessing and protection are gone, and now the beauty of the Lord's temple is gradually being removed. Refer to 1 Kings 7:23-36 for details of these temple items.

Ahaz's appropriation of the panels and bases from the sacred furniture does not seem to be for the purpose of sending a further gift to Tiglath-pileser but rather for de-emphasising their importance in the worship services. Perhaps he planned to reuse them in some other decorative way. At any rate death overtook him before his attention could be turned to them. They are mentioned among the several items that were carried away in the later Babylonian despoiling of Jerusalem; refer to Jeremiah 25:13-14, 27:19-20 and 52:17-23. During these changes, Ahaz shut down the operation of the temple and established small pagan altars all around Judah: <<*Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, and cut in pieces the utensils of the house of God. He shut up the doors of the house of the Lord and made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger the Lord, the God of his ancestors*>> (2 Chronicles 28:24-25).

¹⁹ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁰ Ahaz slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Hezekiah succeeded him.

2 Kings 16:19-20

Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz that he did. Thus the reign of perhaps the worst king of Judah ended. Micah - who prophesied during the reign of Ahaz - describes the man who works to successfully do evil with both hands: <<*Their hands are skilled to do evil; the official and the judge ask for a bribe, and the powerful dictate what they desire; thus they pervert justice*>> (Micah 7:3). The idea is that the man pursues evil with all his effort, with both hands. He may very well have had King Ahaz in mind.

Yet in many ways, Ahaz is a warning to the current generation. He could be considered a church leader from the 21st Century in many ways:

- Based on his admiration of the altar of Damascus, it could be said that Ahaz was a man with an artistic sense of style.
- He was in love with innovation and new things, and did not hesitate to bring these innovations into worship.
- At the same time, he seemed to be a nice man. He did not have the persecuting spirit of his grandson Manasseh who persecuted the prophets and people of God: *<<Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord>> (2 Kings 21:16).*
- Ahaz had the advantage of many great prophets and messengers such as Isaiah and Micah.
- Ahaz had the blessing of a great deliverance of God, when God spared Jerusalem and Judah from total defeat when the armies of Israel and Aram came against them.
- Ahaz had the influence of a godly father and a godly heritage from the line of David.

The key was that Ahaz had no relationship with God. He was interested in spiritual things, and would even make great spiritual sacrifices, such as sacrificing his own sons to Molech. Yet he destroyed the link that his father Jotham made between the palace and the temple, and this was an illustration of his destroyed relationship with God. For Ahaz, it was not enough to have a spiritual interest and all the aforementioned advantages.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.