

The Reign of Ahaz, King of Judah

2 Kings 16

2 Kings 16:1-9 - *"In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.*

Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him. At that time Rezin king of Syria captured Elath for Syria, and drove the men of Judah from Elath. Then the Edomites went to Elath, and dwell there to this day.

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me." And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin."

Background Notes

At the end of 2 Kings 15 we discussed the reign of good King Jotham of Judah. Unfortunately, his son Ahaz did not follow in his father's footsteps. Far from it! In fact, verses 3-4 reveal that Ahaz actually **sacrificed his son** in his worship of foreign gods!

Child sacrifice was strictly forbidden under the Mosaic Law. Sadly, child sacrifice was already practiced regularly in the northern kingdom of Israel, as we'll see in chapter 17. But here we see that this evil practice also came into Judah through King Ahaz. 2 Chronicles 28 says that, in his idolatry, Ahaz sacrificed his **sons - plural!** It was because of this idolatry that God allowed Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of northern Israel, to attack Judah and besiege the capital city of Jerusalem.

Although they were not able to conquer Jerusalem, the attackers did capture some territory, including the important port city of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba. And according to 2 Chronicles 28, they inflicted heavy losses on Judah.

It was about this time that God graciously sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz with the message that the two kings who were attacking him would meet their end in a few years, and there was no need to fear them (Isaiah 7). In fact, it was on this occasion and in this passage that Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah was given.

However, rather than thank the Lord and turn to the Lord for deliverance, King Ahaz sent messengers and money, including Temple treasures, to King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria to ask for his help. Tiglath-Pileser brought Ahaz temporary relief by attacking Damascus, the capital of Syria, and King Rezin of Syria was killed (v9). But Ahaz did not turn to the Lord. In fact, he went even further into idolatry!

Doctrinal Points

1. Idolatry involves the worship of false gods.

2 Kings 16:10-13 - *"Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship, to Urijah the priest. Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest made it before King Ahaz came back from Damascus.*

And when the king came back from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it. So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar."

As a vassal to the Assyrians, King Ahaz went to Syria to meet King Tiglath-Pileser in Damascus, probably to pay further tribute for protection. While Ahaz was in Damascus, he was fascinated by the size and design of a pagan altar he saw there, and so he sent the blueprints back to Jerusalem. He demanded that Urijah the priest build a copy of this pagan altar and have it ready for him when he returned. The fact that Urijah went along with this idolatry shows us how much the priesthood had been compromised and corrupted. Urijah should have withstood King Ahaz, as the priests did when King Uzziah entered the Temple and tried to burn incense before the Lord (2 Kings 15).

From what we've already read in this chapter, we know that King Ahaz was heavily involved in idolatry, but he increased the pagan worship by actually bringing an altar of pagan design into the Temple area! It is argued that Ahaz used this altar in the worship of the Lord, and it was just designed to look like the pagan altar. Well, it may have started out that way. But 2 Chronicles 28 reveals that it wasn't long before King Ahaz was worshiping the gods of Damascus, where he had first seen his impressive altar.

2 Chronicles 28:22-25 - *"Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord. This is that King Ahaz. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, "Because the gods of the*

kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”

Idolatry involves the worship of false gods. The worship of false gods is certainly going on today, and not just in other countries and cultures. Let me ask you: Is the one true God **alone** worshiped in your home? Or have other gods come in, and your home is no longer a Christ-centered home? Idolatry involves the worship of false gods.

2. Idolatry includes false worship of the true God.

2 Kings 15:14-16 - *“He also brought the bronze altar which was before the Lord, from the front of the temple—from between the new altar and the house of the Lord—and put it on the north side of the new altar. Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, ‘On the great new altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king’s burnt sacrifice, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by.’ Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded.”*

Idolatry is not only the worship of false gods. Idolatry also includes **false worship of the true God**. We see this in the life of King Ahaz, in the idolatry that he allowed into the kingdom of Judah.

Ahaz moved the Bronze Altar of the Lord out of its central place in the Temple courts, which was a departure from the divine pattern as given in the book of Exodus. Then Ahaz replaced the Bronze Altar with his new pagan altar. The people were to bring their sacrifices to the Lord to this new altar, and the priests were now to offer the morning and evening sacrifices to the Lord on the new altar! Perhaps Ahaz was thinking that worship should be conducted using a more impressive altar, but this exchange of altars was in direct disobedience to pattern for worship given in God’s Law. Meanwhile, the bronze altar was to be for the king’s personal use - apparently for divination! All of this was a very serious departure from the proper way of worship, as detailed in the Word of God.

Furthermore, we know that although some of the people of Judah used the high places to worship false gods, some of the people were sacrificing to the Lord on the high places. But as we have mentioned before, all sacrifices to the Lord were to take place in Jerusalem, according to Deuteronomy 12. All worship on the high places was idolatry, because it was contrary to the divine pattern, as God had designed it. God had given the plans for proper sacrifices and worship at the Tabernacle, and later the Temple.

Departing from the divine pattern for a way of worship of your own design is a serious form of idolatry. In John 4:23, 24, the Lord Jesus said, *“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and*

truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

In Christendom today, there are kinds of departures from the simple and straightforward approach to the one true God. Because of Christ's one great sacrifice on the cross, and because He is now our High Priest, nothing extra is needed for true worship of the one true God. Altars, icons, images, and incense are not needed to worship the Lord. They are a departure from the simple pattern of worship for the Church as described in the New Testament. Idolatry includes false worship of the true God.

Practical Application

What "king" is directing *your* activity?

2 Kings 16:17-20 - *"And King Ahaz cut off the panels of the carts, and removed the lavers from them; and he took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pavement of stones. Also he removed the Sabbath pavilion that they had built in the temple, and he removed the king's outer entrance from the house of the Lord, on account of the king of Assyria.*

Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place."

All the alterations in the furnishings of the Temple area that are described in verses 17-18 were either to obtain gold and bronze to pay tribute to Tigleth-Pileser, or they were to purposely diminish the glory and grandeur of Israel's Temple, in view of Judah's subservient status under Assyria. In any case, Tigleth-Pileser, the pagan king of Assyria, directly or indirectly manipulated King Ahaz as a puppet. Verse 18 says that all of Ahaz's activities were *"on account of"* – in deference to - the pagan king of Assyria!

What about us? We may say – and we may actually believe - that the Lord is directing all our activities. But wait a minute! Have we gotten ourselves so involved in the world system, and so entangled in the world system, and so obligated to this world system that the Lord is no longer directing our activities? Is it possible that the world, or the sinful flesh, or Satan himself, is directing our activities?

What "king" is directing *your* activity?