

2 Kings Chapter 16

Verses 16:1-17:41: At this point the narrative turns to the defeat and exile of Israel by Assyria. (In 17:7-23), the prophetic writer states the reasons why Israel was punished by the Lord. A major reason was the sinful religion established by Jeroboam I (17:21-23), which was followed by every king in Israel. Ominously, the section begins with the narrative concerning Ahaz of Judah who “walked in the way of the kings of Israel” (16:3). The kind of punishment that came upon Israel would come later upon Judah for the same reason (17:19-20).

2 Kings 16:1 "In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign."

“Seventeenth year”: 735 B.C., since Pekah’s reign began (in 752 B.C.; see note on 15:27). Although Jotham, the father of Ahaz, was still alive (see note on 15:30), Ahaz exercised the sovereign authority in Judah from 735 B.C. to Jotham’s death in ca. 731 B.C. Isaiah (Isa. 1:1-7:1), and Micah (Micah 1:1), the prophets continued to minister to Judah during the reign of Ahaz (see notes on 2 Chron. 28:1-27).

In the last lesson, we learned that Jotham had been a king that pleased the LORD. We also noted that Ahab did not follow in the footsteps of his father. He was very evil. We have mentioned before, that Israel had all evil kings after they broke away into the ten tribes. Judah had some good kings and some evil.

Verses 2-6: “Pass through the fire” refers to child sacrifice, one aspect of worship linked to the Canaanite god Molech (2 Chron. 28:3). For this and other sins of “Ahaz,” God allowed Resin and Pekah to besiege Judah but He prevented complete exile (2 Chron. 28:5-15). Only “Elath” was captured.

2 Kings 16:2 "Twenty years old [was] Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not [that which was] right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father."

“Sixteen years” (731-715 B.C.). The principle of “dual dating” was followed here. In (16:1 and 17:1), Ahaz was recognized as king in the year he came to the throne as a co-regent, but the year of his official accession was determined as the year when he began to reign alone. Ahaz shared royal power with Azariah (to 739 B.C.), and Jotham from (744 to 735 B.C.; see note on 17:1). He exercised total authority as co-regent with Jotham from (735-713 B.C.; see note on 16:1). He was sole king from (731 to 729 B.C.), and was co-regent with his son Hezekiah from (729 to 715 B.C.; see note on 18:1).

Ahaz is descended from David, but he does not please God as David did. Ahaz picks up the idolatrous ways of Israel. He even goes further with his idolatry, than some of the kings of Israel.

Verses 3-4: Ahaz was an apostate. He not only allowed corrupting religious practices to flourish but personally participated in them. His spiritual debauchery include taking part in the heathen Molech sacrifices. This involved sending children “through” the sacrificial “fire” as an offering to the Canaanite god Baal (Lev. 20:1-5; 2 Kings 23-10; Jer. 7:30-33; 19:5-6; 32:35; see the note on 2 Chron. 28:3).

2 Kings 16:3 "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel."

“Walked in the way of the kings of Israel”: This does not necessarily mean that Ahaz participated in the calf worship introduced by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan, but that he increasingly brought pagan, idolatrous practices into the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem. These are specified (in verses 10-16), and parallel those of Jeroboam I in the northern kingdom. This included idols to Baal (2 Chron. 28:2).

“Made his son to pass through the fire”: As a part of the ritual worship of Molech, the god of the Moabites, children were sacrificed by fire (3:27). This horrific practice was continually condemned in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 18:10; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

“The abominations of the heathen” (see note on Deut. 18:9-12).

Speaking of the ways of Israel here, was speaking actually of the ways of Ahab and Jezebel. He worshipped Molech, because that false god involved having your children walk through the fire. The practice of human sacrifice came from the Ammonites and the Moabites. Jeremiah and Chronicles relate the walking through the fire with human sacrifice.

2 Kings 16:4 "And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree."

“The high places”: Ahaz was the first king in the line of David since Solomon who was said to have personally worshiped at the high places. While all the other kings of Judah had tolerated the high places, Ahaz actively participated in the immoral Canaanite practices that were performed at the “high places” on hilltops under large trees (Hosea 4:13).

Some of the other kings had allowed the worship in high places. The difference here is, false gods were worshipped there during the reign of Ahaz.

Verses 5-10 (see the note on 15:29-30).

2 Kings 16:5 "Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome [him]."

“Rezin ... Pekah”: The kings of Syria and Israel wanted to overthrow Ahaz in order to force Judah into their anti-Assyrian coalition. The two kings with their armies besieged Jerusalem, seeking to replace Ahaz with their own king (Isa. 7:1-6). The Lord delivered Judah and Ahaz from this threat because of His promise to David (Isa. 7:7-16).

We read in the previous lesson, how Israel and Syria had made a pact to come against Judah together. It appears at this point, the two countries had come against Ahaz at Jerusalem, after taking some of the outlying towns. They were turned back at Jerusalem. They could not overcome Ahaz at Jerusalem.

2 Kings 16:6 "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day."

“Elath”: The Syrians did displace Judah from Elath (see note on 14:22). Later this important port town of the Gulf of Aqabah was captured by the Edomites.

Elath was one of the little towns that Rezin did take. It appears, the Jews there fled and left it with the Syrians.

2 Kings 16:7 "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I [am] thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me."

“Tiglath-pileser” (see notes on 15:19, 29).

“Thy servant and thy son”: Ahaz willingly became a vassal of the Assyrian king in exchange for his military intervention. This was a pledge that Judah would serve Assyria from this point on. In support of his pledge, Ahaz sent Tiglath-pileser III silver and gold from the temple and from the palace treasuries (verse 8). Evidently the prosperous regions of Azariah and Jotham had replenished the treasures plundered by Jehoash of Israel 50 years earlier during Amaziah’s reign (14:14).

It appears that Ahaz had become afraid that he would not be able to continue to fight off the Syrians and the Israelites, and he calls for help from the Assyrians. Tiglath-pileser was king of Assyria at the time. Ahaz even offers to be subordinate to the Assyrian king. That is what is meant, when he calls himself his son.

2 Kings 16:8 "And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent [it for] a present to the king of Assyria."

Which Uzziah and Jotham had put there. For all that was found there in the times of Amaziah was taken away by Jehoash king of Israel (2 Kings 14:14).

"And in the treasures of the king's house": Whatever gold and silver he had of his own.

"And sent it for a present to the king of Assyria": To obtain his help and assistance.

Ahaz had no respect for the house of the LORD. His only idea was to take the wealth of the temple, and buy them an ally. This had been done before, when it appeared Jerusalem and the temple might be destroyed. He even sent the silver and gold from the palace.

2 Kings 16:9 "And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried [the people of] it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin."

“The king of Assyria hearkened unto him”: According to ‘Assyrian records, (in 733 B.C.). Tiglath-pileser III’s army marched against Damascus, the Syrian capital, laid siege for two years, and captured it. The victorious Assyrian king executed Rezin and deported his subjects to Kir, whose location is unknown.

The Assyrians seemed to be more interested in capturing the enemy and putting them into slavery, than killing them. Assyria attacked Syria immediately, and took Damascus. The king was the only one mentioned, who was killed.

Verses 10-16” The new “altar” represented Ahaz’s allegiance to “Assyria” and his apostasy. His rejection of God eventually reached the point where he completely shut the temple doors and would not let anyone worship there (2 Chron. 28:24). Along with his other acts (in 16:17-18), he began to disassemble the temple.

2 Kings 16:10 "And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that [was] at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof."

“An altar”: When Ahaz traveled to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser III, he saw a large altar (verse 15), which was most likely Assyrian. Ahaz sent a sketch of this altar to Urijah the High-Priest in Jerusalem and Urijah built an altar just like it. The serious iniquity in this was meddling with and changing, according to personal taste, the furnishings of the temple, the design for which had been given by God (Exodus 25:40; 26:30; 27:1-8; 1 Chron. 28:19). This was like building an idol in the temple, done to please the pagan Assyrian king, whom Ahaz served instead of God.

When king Ahaz of Judah went to meet with the Assyrian king in Damascus, he went as a subordinate to the Assyrian king. This altar that Ahaz saw was probably a portable altar that the Assyrian king had with him. Ahaz was probably trying to please the Assyrian king, when he sent instructions to Urijah the priest of the temple in Jerusalem to build one like it. Ahaz was already worshipping heathen gods at this time. This was just one more of many sins he committed.

Verses 11-16: Replacing the “brazen altar” with a pagan altar was only one of several religious changes made by “Ahaz (verse 17; 2 Chron. 28:22-25). He even went as far as to close the temple (2 Chron. 28:24).

2 Kings 16:11 "And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made [it] against king Ahaz came from Damascus."

Exactly according to the size, form, figure, and carved work of it. Though expressly contrary to the command of God; which fixed both the form and matter of the altar of God, with everything appertaining to it. Which he, being high priest, could not be ignorant of (Exodus 27:1). But he was a timeserver, and sought to curry favor with his prince.

"So Urijah the priest made it against King Ahaz came from Damascus": Both king and priest were in haste to have this altar made. Ahaz could not stay till he came home, but sent directions about it from Damascus. And the priest was so expeditious in observing his commands, that he got it done before he came thence to Jerusalem.

Urijah is probably the same as Uriah, and was high priest at the time this happened. It is difficult for me to believe a high priest would stoop so low as to build this heathen altar, even if the wicked king did require him to do it. He did build it however.

Verses 12-13: “Offered”: As did Solomon and Jeroboam before him (1 Kings 8:63; 12:32), Ahaz dedicated the new altar by offering sacrifices.

2 Kings 16:12 "And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon."

Looked at it, and liked it, being exactly according to the pattern he had sent.

"And the king approached the altar, and offered thereon": Either by a priest, or it may be in his own person, having no regard to the laws and appointments of God. Especially as his sacrifices were not offered to him, but to the gods of Damascus and Syria (2 Chron. 28:23).

The offering of the king was probably done for him by the high priest. He brought the offering, and the high priest offered it, would probably be correct.

2 Kings 16:13 "And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar."

Which went together according to the law of God, and was imitated by the Heathens.

"And poured his drink offering": A libation of wine, as probably it was, like what they used according to the Levitical law.

"And sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar": As used according to the same law; for all sorts of sacrifices were offered by idolaters, as by the people of God, in imitation of them.

This is just saying, the various kinds of offerings that were made on this heathen altar.

Verses 14-16: "Brasen altar": Feeling confident about his alterations in the temple, Ahaz moved the old bronze altar dedicated by Solomon (1 Kings 8:22, 54, 64), which stood in front of the temple between the new altar and the temple itself (verse 14). Ahaz had the bronze altar moved to a spot north of the new altar, thereby relegating it to a place of secondary importance. All offerings from then on were to be given on the altar dedicated by Ahaz, while Ahaz reserved the bronze altar for his personal use in seeking guidance (verse 15). The term "inquire" probably referred here to pagan divination through religious rituals. (Deut. 18:9-14), expressly forbade such divination in Israel.

2 Kings 16:14 "And he brought also the brasen altar, which [was] before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar."

That which Solomon made (2 Chron. 4:1), which stood in the court by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord (Lev. 1:5). From the forefront of the house; the front piece of the temple, which was at the eastern gate of it.

"From between the altar and the house of the Lord": For it seems Urijah had placed the new altar behind the old one, more out of sight": The brasen altar standing between that and the eastern gate, or entrance into the temple. Wherefore he removed the brasen altar, and put his new one in the room of it.

"And put it": That is, the brasen altar of Solomon.

"On the north side of the altar": Of the new altar, at the right hand as they went into the temple; where it was as in a corner, in greater obscurity, and the new altar more in view as they came into the temple.

The brazen altar of judgment was removed from the place of prominence, and put at a lesser location than this heathen altar. Each thing in the temple had a spiritual meaning for its location and the metal it was made with. This is all disregarded by Ahaz.

2 Kings 16:15 "And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to inquire by."

Who was not to be commanded by the king in matters of worship, but to attend to the laws and institutions of God.

"Saying, upon the great altar": Meaning the new one, which either was of a larger size than the altar of God, or was greater in the esteem of Ahaz.

"Burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering": The daily sacrifice, morning and evening.

"And the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings": Such as were offered up at any time on the account of the rulers of the land in particular, or of the whole congregation of Israel (see Lev. 4:1).

"And sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice": As it used to be sprinkled upon the altar of the Lord.

"And the brasen altar shall be for me to inquire by": To search, inquire, and consider what was to be done with it; for altars were never inquired by as oracles. The meaning is, that it was never to be made use of but by him, and when he pleased.

The great altar is speaking of the heathen altar. Urijah might have feared for his life, but he should never have allowed this. All of the offerings were to be made on the heathen altar. It would be determined later by Ahaz, what should be done with God's bronze altar.

Verses 16-17: Ahaz made further changes in the temple at Jerusalem. First, he removed the side panels ("borders") and "laver" from the portable stands (1 Kings 7:27-29, 38-39). Second, he removed the large ornate reservoir called "the sea" from atop the 12 bronze bulls to a new stone base (1 Kings 7:23-26). Third, he removed the "covered way," probably some sort of canopy used by the king on the Sabbath. Fourth, he removed "the outer entry," probably a special entrance to the temple used by the king on Sabbaths and feast days (1 Kings 10:5).

2 Kings 16:16 "Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded."

Not only concerning the structure of the altar, but the sacrifices to be offered on it; like king like priest, both apostates and idolaters.

A high priest should not conform to the wishes of the king, when they are opposite to the LORD's wishes. This is an abomination of Ahaz, but also of Urijah.

2 Kings 16:17 "And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that [were] under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones."

In the temple there were ten lavers for the priests to wash in, which are here meant, the singular being put for the plural. And these had bases of brass, on which they were set. And about these bases were borders, which had on them figures of various creatures, lions, oxen, and cherubim. And these Ahaz cut off, either to deface them, in contempt of them, or to convert the brass to other uses, as he might also the bases themselves, since he removed the lavers from off them (see 1 Kings 7:27).

"And took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it": The molten sea Solomon made, which he set upon twelve oxen made of brass. This Ahaz took down from thence, either to abate its magnificence or render it despicable, or for the sake of the brass, of which the oxen were made (see 1 Kings 7:23).

"And put it upon a pavement of stones": Not upon the floor of the temple, for that was of wood, fir, or cedar, but on rows of stones, placed instead of bases for it to stand upon.

Ahaz's capitulation to the Assyrian king was total.

There had been five of these on either side of the entrance of the temple. They were held up by brazen oxen. These were for the numerous washings. It appears that Ahaz had them dismantled also. The sea of water will now just sit on pavement stones. Ahaz is destroying the temple worship little by little.

2 Kings 16:18 "And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria."

Used on the Sabbath day, either for the people to sit under to hear the law explained by the priests. Or for the course of the priests to be in, that went out that day, to give way to the course that entered, which yet did not depart from the temple till evening. Or rather for the king himself to sit under, while attending the temple service of that day, and might be the cover of the scaffold (2 Chron. 6:13), and be very rich cloth of gold. And therefore, he took it away for the king of Assyria, or to signify that he should not frequent the place any more: and hence it follows.

"And the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord": The way which led from the king's palace to it, he turned it around about way, that it might not be discerned there was a way from the one to the other: and this he did.

"For the king of Assyria": To gratify him, that he might from hence conclude that he had wholly relinquished the worship of God in the temple, and should cleave to the gods of Damascus and Syria. Or for fear of him, that he might not see the way into the temple, and take away the vessels; or find him, should he be obliged to hide himself there, when in danger by him.

This is probably, a covered walkway that Solomon had built to get into the house of the Lord for worship. Ahaz tears it down and makes an entrance way for the king of Assyria.

2 Kings 16:19 "Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, [are] they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

Some others are written in the canonical book of Chronicles (2 Chron. 28:1), and were, it is highly probable, in the annals of the kings of Judah, now lost.

2 Kings 16:20 "And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead."

“Hezekiah”: For his reign (see 18:1-20:21).

Ahaz was so evil, he did not even seem to be of Judah. There are numerous battles that are mentioned in this record book. He is buried in Jerusalem with the kings. That really seems too good for him however.

2 Kings Chapter 16 Questions

1. How did Ahaz differ from his father Jotham?
2. How old was Ahaz, when he began to reign?
3. How long did he reign?
4. Who is Ahaz descended from, who was a king who pleased God?
5. He walked in the way of the kings of _____.
6. The ways of Israel was actually speaking of the ways of _____ and _____.
7. What did he cause his children to do?
8. What heathen practice was this?
9. Where did he burn incense, instead of in the temple?
10. What two kings joined forces against Ahaz and Judah?
11. Were they able to overcome Ahaz?
12. What little place did Rezin take?
13. Who was king of Assyria at the time of Ahaz?
14. What did Ahaz ask him to do?
15. What did Ahaz bribe him with?
16. What city of Syria did the Assyrian king take?

17. What did Ahaz see, when he met with the Assyrian king?
18. Who was high priest at the temple at the time?
19. What did Ahaz have him to make?
20. What did they do with the brazen altar?
21. Ahaz made Urijah offer the offerings on which altar?
22. What did Ahaz do to the great sea at the temple?
23. What did he do with the covert for the Sabbath?