

2 Chronicles 27-28 “The Captivity of Idol Worship: Jotham and Ahaz” September 9, 2012

In Ezekiel 18 the prophet explains that if a man is righteous and does what is just and right...  
he is righteous; he shall surely live.

But if he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood... who lifts up his eyes to the idols...  
He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die.

Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done;  
he sees, and does not do likewise... he shall surely live.

Many have wondered:  
is the righteous father, Jotham?  
is his wicked son, Ahaz?  
and is the righteous grandson, Hezekiah?

Obviously, the hypothetical example that Ezekiel gives could have many applications!  
But the main point addresses the sons of wicked fathers:  
you do not have to be like your fathers!  
Repent! And walk in the way of the LORD!  
And the second point addresses the sons of righteous fathers:  
Beware! Your father’s righteousness cannot deliver you from your own sins!

You see this in our text tonight through Jotham and Ahaz.

### **1. Jotham: a Good King with Corrupt People (27:1-9)**

*27 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok. <sup>2</sup> And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices. <sup>3</sup> He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD and did much building on the wall of Ophel. <sup>4</sup> Moreover, he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and forts and towers on the wooded hills. <sup>5</sup> He fought with the king of the Ammonites and prevailed against them. And the Ammonites gave him that year 100 talents<sup>[a]</sup> of silver, and 10,000 cors<sup>[b]</sup> of wheat and 10,000 of barley. The Ammonites paid him the same amount in the second and the third years. <sup>6</sup> So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God. <sup>7</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. <sup>8</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.*

Jotham is a good king who loves the LORD his God.  
*And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD  
according to all that his father Uzziah had done,  
except he did not enter the temple of the LORD.*

The sin of Uzziah is so heinous that the Chronicler feels that he has to mention it again!

Jotham was like his father in all the good ways:  
he worshiped Yahweh, and Yahweh only!  
But the only way that he was different  
was that he did not do the *one thing* that Uzziah did wrong!

He built cities.  
He defeated his enemies.  
And he became mighty –  
all because “he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.” (v6)

Notice that Jotham receives tribute for three years!  
The Chronicler wants to point out that Jotham was a good king,  
so he highlights the good things that happens.  
But while the Chronicler may exaggerate numbers for the sake of making his point,  
he does not willfully distort the truth.  
He reigned for 16 years – but he only received tribute for three of them.

Jotham is the first king since Abijah (170 years ago) who is said to be good – and good only!  
There is no stain on his kingship.  
What is interesting is that the Chronicler alters the one statement from Kings  
that could reflect poorly on Jotham.  
In 2 Kings 15:35 we are told that “the high places were not removed.”  
That *could* be interpreted as a fault with Jotham.  
But here, in verse 2, we are told simply,  
“the people followed corrupt practices.”

Kings wanted to point out that the perennial problem of Judah was not resolved by Jotham.  
The Chronicler’s point seems to be that *in spite of* Jotham’s faithfulness  
the *people* followed corrupt practices.

Still, there is something ominous about this.  
We have now had four straight good kings.  
Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, and Jotham all do right in the eyes of the LORD.  
But Judah still remains weak and impotent–  
because the *people* of Judah keep returning to their corrupt practices –  
the worship at the high places.  
If the people of God will not follow the Christ,  
then what do you expect?

This is why we need a king who will not only do what is right and conquer our enemies,  
but indeed a king who will subdue *us* to his will!  
After all, what God is showing us in the history of Israel and Judah  
is that it is not enough to have a good king!  
If the people will not follow their king,

and the king is unable to draw them after himself to worship Yahweh in his temple,  
then there is no future for the people of God.

And in Jotham's son, Ahaz,  
we discover a king who becomes like his people!

## **2. Ahaz: A Faithless King (28:1-27)**

### **a. The Root Problem: Worship (v1-4)**

*28 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done, <sup>2</sup> but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, <sup>3</sup> and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering,<sup>[c]</sup> according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup> And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.*

Last time I mentioned the three stories in the book of Kings.

The first is the story the house of the David – and the temple in Jerusalem.

The second is the story of Jeroboam – and the golden calves in Bethel and Dan.

The third is the story of Ahab – and the temple of Baal in Samaria.

The Chronicler focuses on the first story – but he is plainly aware of the other two.

As the house of Ahab came to an end,

the house of David began to imitate the house of Ahab.

And so now as the house of Israel is coming to an end,

the house of David is once again following in doomed footsteps.

For the Chronicler, Ahaz is the worst king in Judah's history.

While most kings of the northern kingdom of Israel  
worshiped Yahweh with golden calves,  
and the worst kings of Israel worshiped Baal,  
Ahaz of Judah is worse:

he reverts to Canaanite worship,  
offering his son in the fire.

Verse 4 points out that worship was conducted “under every green tree” –  
a reminder of what God had said in Deuteronomy 12:2,

that Israel was supposed to worship in *one* place,

and *not* worship on the high places on the hills or under every green tree.

Ahaz is every bit as bad as Jotham was good.

The Chronicler has nothing good to say about Ahaz.

He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.

That's a pretty terrible insult,

because even the best of the kings of Israel were idolaters!

He made metal images for the Baals.

He made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom

and burned his sons as an offering.

At the root of all other sin is the sin of idolatry.

After all, consider the “great commandment” – the “Shema” –  
“Hear, O Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one.  
And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

At the root of every other sin is a failure to *love* the LORD your God.  
If you loved the LORD your God with *all* your heart, soul, mind, and strength,  
then you would never sin!

Our problem is that we love and serve other things.

Ahaz engages in every liturgical insult to Yahweh that he can think of!  
By verse 24, Ahaz will even close the doors of the temple of the LORD.

Verse 3 points out that Ahaz adopted the practices of the nations  
“whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.”

The implication is not hard to see:  
the LORD will soon send Judah into exile.

**b. The Result: Defeat in Battle (v5-7)**

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force. <sup>6</sup> For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. <sup>7</sup> And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the commander of the palace and Elkanah the next in authority to the king.*

Indeed, the beginnings of that exile are seen in the days of Ahaz –  
150 years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The king of Syria “took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus.”

The language of verses 5-7 is very similar to the language of chapter 13.

In chapter 13, the good king Abijah defeated Israel,  
because Israel had forsaken the LORD.  
Abijah and the army of Judah “struck them with great force...  
because they relied on the LORD, the God of their fathers.”

Now Israel strikes Judah “with great force,  
because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers.”

In chapter 13, Judah defeats Israel

because Jeroboam had led the northern kingdom into idolatry with the golden calves.  
Now, in chapter 28, Israel defeats Judah  
because Ahaz has led the southern kingdom down the same path.

If you turn away from the worship of the living and true God,  
then God will hand you over to destruction!

And so Israel captured 200,000 people of Judah and took them to Samaria (v8)

**c. Even Israel Heeded the LORD More Than Ahaz! (v8-15)**

<sup>8</sup> *The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. <sup>9</sup> But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven.*

<sup>10</sup> *And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? <sup>11</sup> Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.”*

The Chronicler *rarely* talks about the northern kingdom.

The few things he does say about the northern kingdom  
are generally plundered from the book of Kings.

But verses 9-15 are one of his unique contributions to the history of Samaria.

Because while Judah descends into idolatry and rejects the fear of the LORD,  
Israel, the idolatrous northern kingdom, has a moment of faithfulness!

Oded the prophet exhorts them to beware the coming wrath of the LORD  
if they hold captive the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

And, remarkably, the chiefs of Ephraim agree! (verses 12-13)

<sup>12</sup> *Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war <sup>13</sup> and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” <sup>14</sup> So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. <sup>15</sup> And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.*

Notice that it is “certain chiefs” that rule in this case.

This is the closest the book of Chronicles ever gets

to saying that the northern kingdom was destroyed.  
There is no king in Samaria – only a handful of chiefs –  
because Tiglath-pileser destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 BC,  
and took captive many of the leaders of Samaria.

But notice what the chiefs say:

“you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD  
*in addition to our present sins and guilt.*  
For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” (v13)

Yes, they acknowledge that it would be wrong to enslave their brothers from Judah.  
But behind this is another confession: that they have sinned against God in their worship.  
In the days of Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah,  
you will find the northern tribes returning to Jerusalem to worship the LORD.  
The first step towards that is taken here, in Samaria, by the repentance of the chiefs.

When *you* have sinned – when you have sought first something other than Jesus –  
you need to repent – to acknowledge your *guilt*.  
Our problem is not that we *feel* bad – our problem is our *guilt* before God!  
The solution is not that you need to learn how to feel better about yourself –  
the solution is to repent and believe the gospel –  
that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins and set us free from guilt and shame!

The chiefs recognize their guilt before the LORD –  
and so Samaria restores the people of Judah to their own land.  
Repentance bears *fruit*.  
If you know that you have done wrong, then you need to make it right!

In Luke, chapter 10, Jesus tells the story of a Jew who fell among robbers  
who stripped him, and robbed him, and left him for dead.  
The priest and the Levite pass by on the other side –  
but then a Samaritan had compassion on him,  
“bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.  
Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.”

Incidentally, do you remember where Jesus set the parable?  
On the road from Jerusalem to *Jericho*.

When you see the background in 2 Chronicles 28,  
you may begin to see that the ‘beat up’ Jew is also the rebellious Jew bound for exile.  
The Samaritan of Jesus’ day is not exactly the Samaritan of 2 Chronicles 28,  
but certainly the *shock factor* is the same:  
no one reading the book of Chronicles expects to find *good Samaritans!*  
The northern kingdom is rebellious and wicked.  
Bad things always come from Samaria – right?

But these “good Samaritans” send the feeble Jews home on donkeys!

The Chronicler writes in a day when the Samaritans were worse than ever.

The Samaritans of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. were a mixed breed.

And yet, the Chronicler reminds his hearers

that even among those who are under God’s curse,

we should not be surprised to find humility and grace.

**d. Because Ahaz Thought that Assyria Would Help Him! (v16-21)**

*<sup>16</sup> At that time King Ahaz sent to the king<sup>[d]</sup> of Assyria for help. <sup>17</sup> For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah and carried away captives. <sup>18</sup> And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages. And they settled there. <sup>19</sup> For the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully<sup>[e]</sup> and had been very unfaithful to the LORD. <sup>20</sup> So Tiglath-pileser<sup>[f]</sup> king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. <sup>21</sup> For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the LORD and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, but it did not help him.*

Verse 16 tells us that “At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help.”

We have inscriptions from Assyria that in 734 BC a king “Jehoahaz of Judah” brought tribute to Tiglath-pileser.

[the “jeho” prefix would emphasize that Ahaz was a Yahweh worshiper – one of those ironies of history!]

Ahaz seems to have hoped that allying with Assyria would protect him.

In Kings, we hear that Ahaz’s main fear was the combined forces of Syria and Israel (Damascus and Samaria).

The Chronicler, in verses 17-18 points to an invasion from Edom and Philistia.

In Kings, Assyria delivers Ahaz from the attacks of Syria and Israel.

2 Kings 17:5-9 explain some of the dynamics of the period.

The kings of Syria and Israel formed the Northern Alliance against the Assyrians during the reign of Ahaz’s father, Jotham.

When Jotham and Ahaz of Judah refused to enter the Northern Alliance

Israel and Syria decided to overthrow Ahaz

and set up the son of Tabeel as king in Judah

(Isaiah 7 describes this in more detail).

The promise of Immanuel—God with us—was given to Ahaz in this context.

Ahaz was called by God to trust his promise.

But what did Ahaz do?

*Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying  
I am your servant and your son.*

*Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria  
and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me. (v7)*

Kings tells us that Tiglath-pileser heeded Ahaz and came –  
destroying Damascus (capital of Syria) in 732 BC,  
and then Samaria (capital of Israel) in 722.

The Chronicler tell us that Tiglath-pileser  
“afflicted him instead of strengthening him” (v20).  
Perhaps in the short term you could see some benefit for Ahaz  
(after all, Syria and Israel are no longer a threat).  
But Tiglath-pileser cared nothing for a two-bit tribal chieftain  
from the hill-country of Judah.

He took Ahaz’s money, defeated Ahaz’s enemies – and then attacked Ahaz!

Verse 19 refers to Ahaz as “King of Israel” because with the destruction of the northern kingdom  
the king of Judah is now the only “king of Israel.”

But of course, the reunion of Israel is hardly a joyful thing.  
After all, Ahaz is worse than any king of Israel before him!

If Israel sinned by allying with the Gentiles against the son of David,  
so also the son of David has sinned by allying with the Gentiles right back!

Rather than trust Yahweh,  
Ahaz puts his trust in the king of Assyria and took the silver and gold from the temple  
and sent a present to the king of Assyria.  
Isaiah goes into great lengths in chapters 10 and 20 about the foolishness of trusting in Assyria.  
God had promised to deliver his people.  
Will you trust his promises?  
Or will you trust in man?

But let’s think about Ahaz’s situation:  
Judah is a little bitty country in the mountains.  
They have little in the way of natural resources.  
They have few allies.  
Israel and Syria are the two most powerful nations in the immediate vicinity,  
and now Edom and Philistia has joined with them–  
so Judah is besieged from the north and the east and the west.  
What are you supposed to do?  
You don’t have the resources to defend yourself.  
And all you have to go on is the promise of the prophets  
that God will deliver you.

What do you do?

Well?

What do you do?

Because you face similar situations all the time!

You've got a difficult situation at work.

A couple of people who "have it in for you" are conspiring against you.

Do you play the same game?

Do you go to the "big boss" and try to "get them" back?

That's what Ahaz does.

Ahaz does not believe that God will deliver him.

And so he offers himself (and his whole nation) to the Assyrians.

This is a total renunciation of his calling as the Davidic king.

He is supposed to be the servant of the LORD, the son of God.

(Why do you suppose Isaiah chose to call the deliverer  
"the Servant of the LORD?")

Ahaz seeks to fight the battles of the kingdom of God by the weapons of the world.

And the result of bowing the knee to the powers of this age

is that you wind up worshiping their gods.

#### **e. And Ahaz Sacrificed to the Gods of Damascus (v22-25)**

<sup>22</sup> *In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD—this same King Ahaz.*

<sup>23</sup> *For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.* <sup>24</sup> *And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.* <sup>25</sup> *In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger the LORD, the God of his fathers.*

So in his distress, he did what any good politician would do:

he flip-flopped!

Assyria had betrayed him –

Yahweh had abandoned him.

Who was he supposed to worship?

In verse 23 we are told that he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him.

The gods of the kings of Syria helped them –

maybe they will help me, if I worship them?

We do the same thing.

When God fails us (or, when the church fails us)

we can easily turn to other gods.

It's easy to say, "God didn't do what I wanted,

so I'll find someone who will give me what I want!"

So Ahaz goes to Damascus (where Tiglath-pileser had just conquered the Syrian capital), and he saw the altar that Tiglath-pileser built in Damascus.

When a nation conquered a capital city,  
it was common for them to build an altar to their god in that city.

So Ahaz decides to build an Assyrian altar in Jerusalem.

Why?

No doubt in order to demonstrate his loyalty to Assyria.  
After all, if the king of Judah worships at the Assyrian altar,  
then there is no need for the Assyrians to attack Judah!

But why does Ahaz go to Damascus?

Well, for the same reason that Moses and all Israel went to Mt Sinai:  
God had said "Israel is my son, my firstborn, let my son go that he may worship me"

And so when God redeemed Israel from Egypt, Israel went to worship him,  
and they built an altar to him and worshiped him at Sinai.

Kings tells us that Ahaz has said that he is the son and servant of Tiglath-pileser.

Now he builds an altar and instructs his priests in the worship of Assyria,  
just as Moses had instructed Aaron in the worship of Yahweh.

2 Kings 16:10 it says that *Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar.*

The word "model" is the word used in Exodus 25:9, 40  
to refer to the heavenly pattern for Israel's worship.

Ahaz is substituting the Assyrian pattern of worship for the heavenly pattern.

Normally, Chronicles is far more detailed in matters of worship than the book of Kings.

But with respect to Ahaz's idolatry, Chronicles is much more vague.

Where Kings details the precise changes that Ahaz made –  
the Chronicler summarizes:

"Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God  
and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God,  
and he shut up the doors of the house of the LORD,  
and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods."

The Chronicler is interested in *good worship* – not idolatry!

But it's worth pointing out that Ahaz's actions  
involved a rejection of Yahweh's rule over the nations.

The basins (the vessels) symbolized the flow of water from the temple to the nations.

This suggested Israelite superiority—that Israel's god had "designs" on other nations.

Likewise, the 12 bronze oxen under the sea symbolized Israel—

and the sea itself is a common image of the nations:

suggesting that Israel upheld the nations.

Ahaz is stripping away all of the symbolism  
that might suggest that Yahweh has claim on the nations.  
In other words, Ahaz is engaged in an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC form of political correctness.  
He doesn't want anything in worship that might be offensive to unbelievers.  
He wants the nations to feel "at home" in the temple in Jerusalem.

So he builds an altar patterned after the Assyrian altar—  
and he eliminates everything that suggests that Israel's god has worldwide authority.

If we abandon the heavenly pattern of worship in order to imitate the worship of the nations,  
then we will have nothing to give the nations.

Today people just want to be entertained.  
If we turn worship into entertainment, then we are depriving people of the living water.  
There are churches that have replaced preaching with motivational pep talks—  
and their people are starving to death spiritually.

Our worship should *not* be politically correct.  
Pagans should not feel "comfortable" in worship.

Now that does *not* mean that we should try to drive them away.  
Isaiah also says at the end of Isaiah 19 that God's purpose was the conversion of Assyria!  
(And the Assyrian church was one of the strongholds of early Christianity!)  
We do not seek to entertain the pagans and make them feel at home.  
But neither do we seek to drive them away.  
Rather, we seek to display the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,  
and by the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God),  
we seek to bring them to repentance!

**f. So Ahaz Was Not Buried in the Tombs of the Kings (v26-27)**

*<sup>26</sup> Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. <sup>27</sup> And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.*

Verses 26-27 conclude the reign of Ahaz  
by noting that he was not buried in the tombs of the kings.

Like the bones of his forefathers who were wicked and died unrepentant,  
Ahaz's bones were not mingled with the bones of the righteous.

In those days, burial was somewhat different from burial today.  
You would have a cave or a covered pit.  
In this cave, there would be several raised slabs,  
with trenches on either side – or in the middle.

You would lay the dead body on the slab.  
Then, the next time someone died, you would open the grave,  
and push aside the dry bones of the previous body,  
and put the next body on the slab.

The result would be that the bones of many generations would be mingled together.

Can you see now why they did not want to bury the wicked with the righteous?  
The dead bones of the righteous belong to God.  
That's why the early church prized the bones of the martyrs!

When somebody died a martyr's death,  
that was pretty solid evidence of his faith in Jesus Christ!  
And that means that his body - yes, that same dead body - would one day rise again.  
That body belonged to Jesus (after all, we belong to Jesus both in body and in soul!).

Their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in the grave until the resurrection!