

ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

AHAZ: Hitting the Bottom and Finding Hope

(2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28)

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The Apostle Paul wrote several of his letters to churches that had serious struggles. Even to the worst of them, the only exception being the Galatian church, he had good things to say and reasons to give thanks for them. That same pattern is demonstrated by the Chronicler as he tells the story of Judah's kings. Until he gets to the very last ones that were present for the exile, he always has good things to say about the kings of Judah, with one very clear exception. That exception is Ahaz. We will see similar evil when we come to Manasseh, but we will also hear about good there. Not with Ahaz. Ahaz represents one of the darkest periods of Judah's history. Everything we are told about him reflects his gross unfaithfulness to Yahweh and the covenant. Let's highlight a couple of the particular issues that the Chronicler lays out here. We will primarily deal with the account from Chronicles because it gives us a fuller picture of Ahaz's dark reign.

The primary way that Ahaz is described, from the beginning of his story to the end, is in comparison to the kings of Israel. In **2 Chronicles 28:2** we read, **"but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel."** That is followed by a detailed list of actions that show his complete rejection of the worship of Yahweh in favor of the gods of the land. He erects idols in the Temple. He worships on all of the high places. Maybe the worst thing, something that we parents will struggle to comprehend, is that he offered his sons, his flesh and blood children, as burnt offerings to Baal. In order to gain favor with the fertility gods of the Canaanites, he offered that most precious of gifts, the very seed through which Yahweh had promised to maintain the line of David. This was the common practice of the Canaanites, but it was something that the children of Israel were clearly told was an abomination to Yahweh. In Leviticus 18, there is a list of abominations that they were to abhor and completely avoid, one of those being child sacrifice. So this was not an oversight; it was a blatant rejection of the covenant.

Ahaz paid a price for his sins. Because of his idolatry, and his leading of the people of Judah into idolatry, Yahweh opposed him. We read in **2 Chronicles 28:5f** that He sent the armies of Israel and Syria to attack Judah. In that assault, they killed 120,000 of the army of Judah. That is a staggering number. In addition, they took captive 200,000 women and children from **"their relatives"** and led them to Samaria. The Israelites planned to keep these captives as slaves.

Here is where the story becomes surprising. The Chronicler has up to this point depicted Israel as the faithless tribes and Judah as the land of the faithful. A switch happens here. Ahaz is the evil, faithless king in the likeness of the kings of Israel,

and the leaders of Israel, in particular three men of the tribe of Ephraim, show a spirit of repentance. They care for the captives and send them home. These men also show an awareness of their accumulated guilt from decades of faithlessness.

Ahaz should have had that same repentant spirit. He did not. Instead, he sank deeper into idolatry. He tried to enlist the help of Assyria in his struggle with the Edomites by sending them a lot of loot. Instead of helping him, the Assyrians became lords over Ahaz, requiring him to pay tribute annually. Ahaz was now a slave to the people from whom he sought help.

Finally, in **vs.22** we see these sad words: ***“In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD—this same King Ahaz.”*** All of the hardship that Yahweh brought on him to bring him to repentance, all of his trouble that should have awakened him to what he was doing, had no positive effect. Instead of repenting, he went deeper into faithlessness. And in **vs.25** we read this summary statement, ***“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.”*** Because of all of the evil that he did, and his rejection of the God of his fathers, he was not even buried with the other kings. The writer simply says that he was buried in the city. His notorious life did not merit burial with the other kings of Judah.

So, what are we to take away from this story? There are three things I want to note. First, sin always has a cost, and most times it will cost us more than we imagine. Ahaz went to Assyria to get help from his enemies. He thought that a pagan king was the best option to protect himself. Yet, he ended up a vassal of an even greater and more dangerous enemy. In fact, the Assyrians would come to Judah in a few short years to bring Jerusalem to ruin. His quest to find security through the power and strength of a pagan king actually led him to become a slave to that same king.

This is so often the case with us. We seek salvation through so many avenues, whether it is through academic achievement, professional performance, material gain, or relational manipulation. We might find some sense of security, but we will also find ourselves slaves of those very same sources. If my sense of value or security is in pleasing people, then I am in fact a slave to those people. They have something I think I need, and they demand from me gifts of pleasure in exchange for that value. In the end, I end up deeper in need than I was at the start. Sin and idolatry are insatiable. As Romans 6 tells us, we are slaves to sin as we submit ourselves to it. Sin is not simply bad behavior. It is a cruel slave master that is forever demanding more and more from us. It is better to know this at the beginning before we get in too deep.

Secondly, when we do sin and enslave ourselves to our idols, our Heavenly Father will come with His discipline to break the bonds of our slavery. He does this often through distress. That sense of struggle or pain is designed to bring to our minds and hearts a new level of sobriety. It is a wakeup call. Yet, we can respond in two ways. Either we listen to the pain and frustration and allow them to break our obstinate self-determination, driving us back into humble repentance and trust in Yahweh’s rule over us, or we hunker down even more into our proud, self-willed quest for security and happiness. When this happens, the pain simply hardens our

hearts against humble trust. We will grow angry and resolute to trust no one but ourselves. This is the course Ahaz took, and it led to his destruction. Listen to your frustration. Listen to your distress. What you are seeking might ultimately cause your downfall. Maybe our Father in Heaven is allowing us to hunger and struggle so that we will come to the end of ourselves and once again turn to him in humble reliance.

Finally, there is no power of evil that can stop the fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant promise. We saw this also in the story of Joash and Athaliah. Ahaz sacrifices his sons, the heirs of his throne, to pagan gods. Through Yahweh's providential rule, Ahaz's heir would survive and become one of Judah's best kings--Hezekiah. How does Yahweh do this? Ahaz had a wife named Abijah, who was the daughter of Zechariah (2 Chronicles 29:1). Zechariah was a faithful priest, the one who instructed Uzziah in the ways of the LORD, which tells us he was one of the good guys. It is also reasonable to think that he taught his children, including his daughter Abijah. We don't know why she was given in marriage to Ahaz. It was before he took the throne and possibly before he had opportunity to show his true self. Never the less, with Abijah, Ahaz had a son, Hezekiah, who would be the next king. It is hard to imagine that someone like Hezekiah could come from a father like Ahaz. The hand of Yahweh was at work, for that son more than likely learned much about the covenant through his mother who had a godly heritage.

Yahweh did not abandon His people in this time of unspeakable evil and idolatry. In the place of a blatantly evil king, He raised up a new king who would turn the whole nation back to covenant faithfulness to Yahweh. He did this in Ahaz's day. He will do it again centuries later. Unknown to the whole nation of Israel, in that first Christmas season which took place during a very dark time, a new king was conceived. He would be born to an unknown, yet faithful, country maiden, in the midst an oppressed and faithless people. This King would bring an end to the slavery of sin and a light to their spiritual darkness. He would do that by paying the full price of the idolatry and faithlessness of His people Himself. And no evil, even the horrible actions of Herod, who would do everything in his power to destroy this new king, could stop Yahweh from fulfilling His promise to save His people. He did so then, and He still does so today.