
Ahaz

Henry Allen Ironside

(2 Kings 16; 2 Chron. 28)

Contemporary Prophets: Isaiah; Micah; Hosea; Oded.

“It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.”—**Proverbs 16:12**

Ahaz was wicked as his father Jotham was righteous. “Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father: for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places” (not removed in Jotham’s day, **2 Kings 15:35**), “and on the hills, and under every green tree.” It seems strange that the best of men frequently have the worst of sons. Ahaz’ mother is not mentioned, and it is possible that his father was unfortunate in his choice of a wife. A king with the heavy responsibilities of government pressing constantly upon him can have little time to give to the training of his children: that important duty must fall largely on the mother. It was not every king of Judah that was blessed with such a mother as king Lemuel’s (**Prov. 31**). But whoever, or whatever, Ahaz’ mother may have

been, he was himself responsible for his idolatrous deeds, and God punished him accordingly. “Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.” These statements in no way clash with what is recorded in **2 Kings 16:5**—that these confederate kings “could not overcome him.” They could not get into the city, nor reach the king personally, though they entered the land. “God delivered him,” and “they smote him,” means his people and kingdom. Elath was also lost to Judah at this time (**2 Kings 16:5**). It was the purpose of “the two tails of these smoking firebrands” to dethrone king Ahaz, and set up in his stead “the son of Tabeal” (a Syrian, probably; it is not a Hebrew name). It was doubtless Satan’s plot, if not man’s, to destroy the Davidic dynasty; and God, for this reason, did not deliver Jerusalem into their hands. But the slaughter and slavery of the people at large throughout the kingdom was something almost unparalleled. See **2 Chron. 28:6**. This is why Isaiah took with him his son Shear-jashub (*the remnant shall return*), when he went forth to meet king Ahaz. There should be a remnant left to return to the land; and the virgin should bear a son, so there should not fail a king upon the throne of David. The dynasty could never be destroyed, for of Immanuel’s kingdom there shall be no end. See **Isa. 7**.

“Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men”—the flower of Ahaz’ army—“because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers.” And though the king himself escaped, God’s rod reached him through his son: “And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king’s son.” He also slew the “governor of the house,” and

“Elkanah that was next to the king.” How, or where, we know not. God can find the guilty where and when He will.

“And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons and daughters, and took away also much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?”—alas, how many and how great were Israel’s sins! “Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you”—and they were themselves, in a few short years, carried captive beyond Babylon. “Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the Lord already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.”

Here is faithfulness and denunciation of sin where one might least expect it—in the city of Samaria, and from leaders, heads of the people. There were not ten righteous men in Sodom; and Samaria, one might think, was not much better. But all there had not bowed the knee to Baal, and they speak for truth and right with boldness in the

very face of a returning, victorious army. And their words have the desired effect; for the wicked will sometimes give heed to the words of the righteous in a most wonderful way. "So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria." Their conduct was morally beautiful, especially when looked at upon the dark background of the evil times and kingdom in which they lived. And the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness has seen to it that these men of tender heart and upright conscience should be "expressed by name." The incident is like a little gleam of light shining out of the rapidly deepening darkness, and the God of Israel has placed it on eternal record, and published it abroad, that men might know that He never forgets a kindness done to His people, even when they suffer, under His government, the just punishment of their sins.

"At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him." Yes, it was "*at that time*," when Israel, the last, was first, and Ahaz, on the throne of David, frantically invoking the aid of the Assyrian, became last. The Edomites, emboldened, doubtless, by the success of Rezin and Pekah, invaded the land and "carried away captives." The Philistines also invaded "the low country, and the south of Judah," and settled themselves in the captured cities. "For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked [lawless, N. Tr.], and transgressed sore against the Lord."

The days were indeed dark: a cloud of gloom had settled over the once fair land and kingdom of David. Stroke succeeded stroke, and humiliation followed humiliation. But there was no national repentance, and the king (the responsible cause of it all) only hardened himself in rebellion and folly. The king of Assyria came, but, instead of really helping him, “distressed him.” He took the treasure Ahaz “stripped” for him from the house of the Lord, and from his own house, and the houses of the princes. It was just as the prophet Isaiah had forewarned him: “The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father’s house, days that have not come, from the days that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria” (**Isa. 7:17**). He trusted in man, made flesh his arm, his heart departing from the Lord, and brought upon himself and kingdom the consequent curse and barrenness (**Jer. 17:5**). “And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord.” How different was his great ancestor David ! “In my distress,” he says, “I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God” (**Ps. 18:6**). Even his wicked grandson Manasseh sought the Lord his God “when he was in affliction.” But Ahaz seemed determined to fill up the measure of his sins, and, like the apostates of Christendom during the outpouring of “the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth,” who, though “they gnawed their tongues for pain,” still “blasphemed the God of heaven,” and repented not of their deeds to give Him glory (**Rev. 16**). Each humiliating disaster, instead of turning Ahaz to God, drove him further into sin. It is plainly seen therefore why the inspired chronicler should despisingly write, “This is that king Ahaz!”

Oh, the blind delusion of demon-worship!—“He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, *which smote him*: and he said,

Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.” He says, in effect, “Jehovah does not help me as the deities of the Syrian kings help them; so it is better for me to forsake Him and worship gods that will do me some good.” So he “gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord.” His apostasy was now complete. “And he made him altars [for false gods] in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.” How far can they fall who, instead of being obedient to the word of God, are moved and governed by everything which has some present, apparent success!

How shameful is his obsequious appeal to the king of Assyria—“I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria”—and that greedy monarch, for the silver and gold sent him, went to Damascus and slew Rezin, its king. “And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria”—at his command perhaps, to do him honor personally—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. 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. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon. 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.” The pattern of the altar caught his ritualistic eye, and he must needs imitate it—not

unlike a class to-day who go to Rome for elties, and then set up at home cheap imitations in churches that were once called Protestant. The real Rome awes men (for Babylon is “the Great”), but her little imitators move us only to pity. King Ahaz finds in Urijah the high priest a willing tool to his idolatrous designs. Untrue to his name (*light of Jehovah*), he yields unscrupulous obedience to his sovereign’s orders, instead of rebuking him for his abominable act. For his degrading subserviency, probably, his name is omitted from the sacerdotal list in **1 Chron. 6:4-15**, Better have lost life than honor—when it is that true and eternal honor “which comes from God.”

On this altar of new design Ahaz offers every kind of offering excepting that which he needed most for himself—the *sin-offering*. The plain brazen altar (“which was before the house of the Lord”) seems to have offended his esthetic eye; so it was relegated to a place of comparative obscurity on the north side of his own foreign substitute. He arrogantly commanded the high priest as to what, and how, and when, to offer on his altar. And the unworthy successor of Jehoiada and Zechariah slavishly obeyed to the letter. “Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.” He reversed the apostles’ maxim, that we “ought to obey God rather than men.” *He* was of another mind: his eye was on the honor that comes from man; theirs was on that which comes from God.

“And king Ahaz cut off the borders [Heb., panels] of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones.” Probably to obtain the precious metals of which they were made, these sacrilegious innovations were introduced. “And the covert for the sabbath”—(covered way) to be used on the sabbath by the royal worshipers— “that they had built in the house

[of God], and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord for the king of Assyria." It was the high-gate that his father Jotham had so significantly rebuilt. Ahaz appears to have profaned it to the use of Tiglath-pileser when worshiping his false gods (at Ahaz' altar perhaps) on his visit to Jerusalem. "And the brazen altar," he said, "shall be for me to inquire by," or "consider." He either meant that he should use it for purposes of divination,—linking Jehovah's great name with his base idolatries,—or he would "consider" what should ultimately be done with it. And we Christians "have an altar," even Christ, our Creator-Redeemer, whom profane unitarian Higher Critics and others dare to debase and degrade before their deceived disciples, removing Him from His place of absolute preeminence, (like Ahaz with God's altar,) putting Him beside others, like Zoroaster and Confucius, for "odious" comparison! And already they "consider" what they shall finally do with Him—relegate Him to a place even of inferiority to some of their heathen Asiatic reformers! And what shall the end be? We know: "Another shall come in his own name," and him they "will receive" (**John 5:43**). The "man of sin—the son of perdition"—is to arise; and "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,...God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," etc. (**2 Thess. 2:10, 11.**)

"Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel." "His acts," and "his ways"! God too has "ways" and "acts." "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel" (**Ps. 103:7**). His *ways* were the manifestations of His nature; His *acts* more the displays of His power. "All his ways," it is said of Ahaz. And what manifestations of his heart's wickedness did his life of thirty-six years bring out! It is little wonder that the

inspiring Spirit led the chronicler to call him “king of Israel” (**2 Chron. 28:19**)—so like was he to the nineteen idolatrous rulers of the northern kingdom. Even his people who shared in his wickedness are called “Israel,” instead of Judah (**2 Chron. 28:23**). But there must have been some sense of righteousness (or shame) left in them; for we read, “They buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel.” Corrupt as they themselves were, they felt that their late king had so exceeded in wickedness that it was not meet to lay his body among those of his royal ancestors.

The Philistines, who had good cause to fear the kings of Judah, had a special prophecy written for them by Isaiah at this time, bidding them not to rejoice at king Ahaz’ death: “In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden.” See **Isa. 14:28-32**, paragraphed as in N. Tr. He appears to have been little influenced by the faithful ministry of the evangelist-prophet. He was apparently a man of esthetic tastes (as even the ungodliest of men may be), from his admiration of the Damascus altar; he was also interested in the sciences, it would seem, from his introduction into Jerusalem of the Chaldean sun-dial (**2 Kings 20:11**). Nor was he of a persecuting spirit, apparently, for he did not, like his grandson Manasseh, shed innocent blood, nor put to death the prophets. He was possessed (Ahaz—*possessor*) of much that men admire and magnify to-day; but all this, without godliness, is of absolutely no worth. Impenitent to the last, apparently, he died as he had lived: “and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.”
