

# SECOND KINGS

## Chapter 16

### *Ahaz Reigns in Judah*

In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 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 his God, as his father David had done, 3 but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. 4 And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree. 5 Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. 6 At that time Rezin the king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah from Elath, and the Edomites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day. 7 So 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." 8 Ahaz also 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 a present to the king of Assyria. 9 And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin. 10 When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. 11 And Uriah the priest built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, so Uriah the priest made it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. 12 And when the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar and went up on it 13 and burned his burnt offering and his grain offering and poured his drink offering and threw the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. 14 And the bronze altar that was before the LORD he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of his altar. 15 And King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, "On the great altar burn the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering and the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. And throw on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice, but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by." 16 Uriah the priest did all this, as King Ahaz commanded. 17 And King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands and removed the basin from them, and he took down the sea from off the bronze oxen that were under it and put it on a stone pedestal. 18 And the covered way for the Sabbath that had been built inside the house and the outer entrance for the king he caused to go around the house of the LORD, because of the king of Assyria. 19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 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 place.

**16:1** *seventeenth year of Pekah.* 735 B.C. The reign of Ahaz apparently overlapped that of Jotham, with Ahaz serving as a senior partner beginning in 735. (CSB)

**16:2** *twenty years old when he became king.* Perhaps the age at which Ahaz became a senior co-regent with his father Jotham in 735 B.C. Otherwise, according to the ages and dates provided, Ahaz would have been 11 or 12 instead of 14 or 15 years old when his son Hezekiah was born (cf. 18:1–2). (CSB)

*sixteen years.* The synchronizations of the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah with those of Pekah and Hoshea of the northern kingdom present some apparent chronological difficulties. It seems best to take the 16 years specified here as the number of years Ahaz reigned after the death of Jotham, thus 732–715. The beginning of his reign appears to be dated in a variety of ways in the Biblical text: (1) in 744/743, which presupposes a co-regency with his grandfather Azariah at the tender age of 11 or 12 (see 17:1); (2) in 735, when he became senior co-regent with Jotham (see v. 1); and (3) in 732, when he began his sole reign after the death of Jotham. (CSB)

*as his father David.* Ahaz does not even receive the qualified approval given to Amaziah (14:3), Azariah (15:3) and Jotham (15:34). (CSB)

All Judean rulers were compared with David, the ideal king and founder of Judah’s dynasty. (TLSB)

**16:3–4** Record leaves no doubt that Ahaz rivaled the northern kings in wickedness. He engaged in all “the despicable practices” of Canaanite Baal worship (vv 1–4). (TLSB)

**16:3** *ways of the kings of Israel.* It is unlikely that Ahaz adhered to the calf worship introduced by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan (see 1Ki 12:26–32; 13:33–34; 14:16). The reference here is probably to Baal worship in the spirit of Ahab (see notes on 1Ki 16:31–33; see also 2Ch 28:2). (CSB)

*burned his son as an offering.* Israel had been warned by Moses not to engage in this pagan rite (see Lev 18:21; Dt 18:10). In Israel the firstborn son in each household was to be consecrated to the Lord and redeemed by a payment of five shekels to the priests (see Ex 13:1, 11–13; Nu 18:16). See also 3:27; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; 2Ch 28:3; Jer 7:31; 32:35. (CSB)

2Ch 28:3, where Hbr verb “to burn” is used; see also the account of human sacrifice by the king of Edom (2Ki 17:31). Ahaz’s grandson Manasseh likewise “burned his son as an offering” (21:6). Such a practice was typically associated with the gods Chemosh and Molech. Luth: “Reverence and fear constitute the true and God-pleasing worship. If Abraham had killed his son because of foolish zeal and with contempt for the Word of God as Ahaz did (2 Kings 16:3), it would indeed have been myrrh, that is, a difficult and painful sacrifice that distresses the heart. But God does not look at the outward work; He looks at the heart itself” (AE 4:100). (TLSB)

*despicable ... nations.* In Dt 12:31, Moses warned the Israelites not to adopt the practice of the Canaanites, who “burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods” (cf Jer 7:31; 19:4–5; Ezk 16:20; 20:31) (TLSB)

**16:4** *high places.* These high places appear to be those assimilated from pagan Baal worship and used for the worship of the Lord in a syncretistic fashion. (CSB)

*under every green tree.* Large trees were viewed as symbols of fertility by the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan. Immoral pagan rites were performed at shrines located under such trees. Contrary to the explicit prohibition of the Mosaic covenant, the Israelites adopted this pagan custom (see 17:10; 1Ki 14:23; Dt 12:2; Jer 2:20; 3:6; 17:2; Eze 6:13; 20:28; Hos 4:13–14). (CSB)

**16:5** *Rezin ... and Pekah ... came up to wage war on Jerusalem.* Cf 15:29 for the reason behind this so-called Syro-Ephraimitic war, which also was the occasion for the Immanuel prophecy (Is 7). (TLSB)

*could not conquer him.* See Isa 7:1–17; 2Ch 28:5–21. Rezin and Pekah desired to replace Ahaz on the throne of the southern kingdom with the son of Tabeel in order to gain another ally in their anti-

Assyrian political policy. The Lord delivered Judah and Ahaz from this threat in spite of their wickedness because of the promises of the Davidic covenant (see 1Ki 11:36; 2Sa 7:13; Isa 7:3–7, 14). (CSB)

**16:6** *Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath.* LXX has “King of Edom.” Hbr words for Edom and Aram (Syria), which originally had no vowels, are composed of consonants that look similar. Earlier, Uzziah had defeated the Edomites; Elath, the southern port city, had been occupied by Amaziah. (TLSB)

*Edomites came to Elath.* See 2Ch 28:17. The Philistines also took this opportunity to avenge previous defeats (compare 2Ch 26:5–7 with 2Ch 28:18). (CSB)

Perhaps the Edomites were allied with Syria and gained by their ally’s victories in the north; they were likely contending with Judah over sources of copper. (TLSB)

**16:7** *your servant and your son.* Ahaz preferred to seek security for Judah by means of a treaty with Assyria rather than by obedience to the Lord and trust in his promises (see Ex 23:22; Isa 7:10–16). (CSB)

**16:8** *silver and gold found in the house of the Lord.* The temple treasure must have been restored to some degree by Jotham (see 12:18; 14:14). The name “Jehoahaz of Judah” (Ahaz) appears on a list of rulers (including those of the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites) who brought tribute to Tiglath-Pileser in 734 B.C. (CSB)

**16:9** *marched up against Damascus and took it.* In 732 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III moved against Damascus and destroyed it (see the prophecies of Isa 7:16; Am 1:3–5). (CSB)

*carrying its people captive to Kir.* The Arameans were sent back to the place from which they had come (Am 9:7) in fulfillment of the prophecy of Amos (Am 1:5). The location of Kir is unknown, though it is mentioned in connection with Elam in Isa 22:6. (CSB)

Probably a city on the Euphrates, where they had sojourned before they migrated farther north and east (Am 9:7). (TLSB)

**16:10** *Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser.* As a vassal king to express his gratitude and loyalty to the victorious Assyrian ruler. (CSB)

*Damascus.* Capital of Syria; lay across the conqueror’s path into Israel. Tiglath-pileser therefore “marched up against Damascus and took it” (v 9) before he overran Israel (15:29). Ten years later, Israel’s capital, Samaria, would be captured by the Assyrians. (TLSB)

*altar that was at Damascus.* Perhaps that of the god Rimmon (see 5:18; 2Ch 28:23), but more likely a royal altar of Tiglath-Pileser. Ahaz’s reproduction of such an altar would have been a further sign of submission to the Assyrians. (CSB)

After receiving aid from Tiglath-pileser in his struggle against the kings of Israel and Syria (vv 5–9), Ahaz also had an Assyrian altar erected in the Jerusalem temple (vv 10–18). Ahaz manifested abject submission to Tiglath-pileser by giving the worship of the Assyrian idol a place in the Jerusalem temple. (TLSB)

**16:12** *went up on it.* The altar was significantly elevated. Cf Ex 20:26. (TLSB)

**16:13** *burnt offering ... grain offering ... drink offering ... fellowship offerings.* With the exception of the drink offering, these same sacrifices were offered at the dedication of the temple (1Ki 8:64). (CSB)

**16:14** *bronze altar.* Made by Solomon (1Ki 8:64). It lost its place of prominence to the replica of “the great altar” of the Assyrian god Asshur, whose worship the conqueror already had established in the former Syrian capital (2Ki 16:14–15). (TLSB)

*north side of the new altar.* Ahaz removed the bronze altar from its prominent place in front of the temple and gave it a place alongside the new stone altar. (CSB)

**16:15–16** As happened under Jeroboam in Israel, Ahaz corrupted and replaced the true worship of Yahweh with false worship. Uriah’s complicity shows the weakness and corruption of the Levitical priesthood. Daily sacrifices would now be offered to another god. (TLSB)

**16:15** *great new altar.* Even though fire from heaven had inaugurated and sanctioned the use of the bronze altar for the worship of the Lord (see 2Ch 7:1), Ahaz now replaced it with an altar built on the pattern of the pagan altar from Damascus. Although the bronze altar was quite large (see 2Ch 4:1), the new altar was larger. (CSB)

*morning burnt offering.* See 3:20; Ex 29:38–39; Nu 28:3–4. (CSB)

*king’s burnt offering and his grain offering.* There is no other reference to these special offerings of the king in the OT, with the possible exception of Ezekiel’s depiction of the offerings of a future prince (Eze 46:12). (CSB)

Ahaz dragged the nation into his sin. (TLSB)

*shall be foe to inquire.* Seeking omens by the examination of the entrails of sacrificed animals is well attested in ancient Near Eastern texts. Here Ahaz states his intention to follow an Assyrian divination technique in an attempt to secure the Lord’s guidance. (CSB)

The apostate king may have gone so far in desecrating the bronze altar as to use it for examining entrails of sacrificial animals for good or bad omens, a mode of divination used also by the king of Babylon (Ezk 21:21). However, he may have retained it for inquiring of the Lord, mixing religions as happened in Israel. (TLSB)

**16:17** *took down the Sea from the bronze bulls.* See 1Ki 7:23–26. Perhaps the bronze was needed for tribute required by Tiglath-Pileser III. (CSB)

**16:18** *he caused to go around.* Unclear why structural changes were made in the temple “because of the king of Assyria,” i.e., in deference to him. (CSB)

*because of the king of Assyria.* As a vassal of Tiglath-Pileser, Ahaz was forced to relinquish some of the symbols of his own royal power. (CSB)

**16:19** *the rest of the acts of Ahaz.* See 2Ch 28, where, among other things, it is said that Ahaz went so far as to “shut the doors of the temple” (2Ch 28:24). (CSB)

**16:20** *Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.* For the reign of Hezekiah see 18:1–20:21. (CSB)

**Ch 16** After generations of relatively faithful rulers, Judah is led badly astray by Ahaz, who is cowed by the pressures from Israel, Syria, and Assyria. In savage irony, the wicked King Ahaz, who sacrifices his son to a false god, would receive the sign of Immanuel that announced the coming of the Son of God, our

Savior (Is 7:10–25; 9:6–7; 11:1–9). At all times—even the worst of times—the Lord has us and our salvation on His heart. • Deliver us, O Lord, from wicked leaders who would corrupt or impede the offerings and praise of Your dear people. Amen. (TLSB)