

# CHAPTER 16

This chapter is wholly taken up with the reign of Ahaz; and we have quite enough of it, unless it were better. He had a good father, and a better son, and yet was himself one of the worst of the kings of Judah.

- I. He was a notorious idolater (v. 1-4).
- II. With the treasures of the temple, as well as his own, he hired the king of Assyria to invade Syria and Israel (v. 5-9).
- III. He took pattern from an idol's altar which he saw at Damascus for a new altar in God's temple (v. 10-16).
- IV. He abused and embezzled the furniture of the temple (v. 17, 18). And so his story ends (v. 19, 20).

## ~~1261~~ 2 KINGS 16:1-4

### THE REIGN OF AHAZ

We have here a general character of the reign of Ahaz. Few and evil were his days — few, for he died at thirty-six — evil, for we are here told,

1. That he *did not that which was right like David* (v. 2), that is, he had none of that concern and affection for the instituted service and worship of God for which David was celebrated. He had no love for the temple, made no conscience of his duty to God, nor had any regard to his law. Herein he was unlike David; it was his honour that he was of the house and lineage of David, and it was owing to God's ancient covenant with David that he was now upon the throne, which aggravated his wickedness; for he was a reproach to that honourable name and family, which therefore was really a reproach to him (*Degeneranti genus opprobrium — A good extraction is a disgrace to him who degenerates from it*), and though he enjoyed the benefit of David's piety he did not tread in the steps of it.

2. That he walked *in the way of the kings of Israel* (v. 3), who all worshipped the calves. He was not joined in any affinity with them, as Jehoram and Ahaziah were with the house of Ahab, but, *ex mero motu* —

*without any instigation*, walked in their way. The kings of Israel pleaded policy and reasons of state for their idolatry, but Ahaz had no such pretence: in him it was the most unreasonable impolitic thing that could be. They were his enemies, and had proved enemies to themselves too by their idolatry; yet he walked in their way.

**3.** That he *made his sons to pass through the fire*, to the honour of his dunghill-deities. He burnt them, so it is expressly said of him (~~448B~~2 Chronicles 28:3), burnt some of them, and perhaps made others of them (Hezekiah himself not excepted, though afterwards he was never the worse for it) to pass between two fires, or to be drawn through a flame, in token of their dedication to the idol.

**4.** That he did *according to the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out*. it was an instance of his great folly that he would be guided in his religion by those whom he saw fallen into the ditch before his eyes, and follow them; and it was an instance of his great impiety that he would conform to those usages which God had declared to be abominable to him, and set himself to write after the copy of those whom God had cast out, thus walking directly contrary to God.

**5.** That he *sacrificed in the high places*, v. 4. If his father had but had zeal enough to take them away, the debauching of his sons might have been prevented; but those that connive at sin know not what dangerous snares they lay for those that come after them. He forsook God's house, was weary of that place where, in his father's time, he had often been detained before the Lord, and performed his devotions on high hills, where he had a better prospect, and under green trees, where he had a more pleasant shade. It was a religion little worth, which was guided by fancy, not by faith.

## ~~1216B~~ 2 KINGS 16:5-9

### THE REIGN OF AHAZ

Here is,

**1.** The attempt of his confederate neighbours, the kings of Syria and Israel, upon him. They thought to make themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to set a king of their own in it, ~~2370B~~ Isaiah 7:6. In this they fell short, but the

king of Syria recovered Elath, a considerable port upon the Red Sea, which Amaziah had taken from the Syrians, <sup><1242></sup>2 Kings 14:22. What can those keep that have lost their religion? Let them expect, thenceforward, to be always on the losing hand.

**2.** His project to get clear of them. Having forsaken God, he had neither courage nor strength to make head against his enemies, nor could he, with any boldness, ask help of God; but he made his court to the king of Assyria, and got him to come in for his relief. Those whose hearts condemn them will go any where in a day of distress rather than to God. Was it because there was not a God in Israel that he sent to the Assyrian for help? Was the rock of ages removed out of its place, that he stayed himself on this broken reed? The sin itself was its own punishment; for, though it is true that he gained his point (the king of Assyria hearkened to him, and, to serve his own turn, made a descent upon Damascus, whereby he gave a powerful diversion to the king of Syria, v. 9, and obliged him to let fall his design against Ahaz, carrying the Syrians captive to Kir, as Amos had expressly foretold, <sup><1116></sup>2 Kings 1:5), yet, considering all, he made but a bad bargain; for, to compass this,

**(1.)** He enslaved himself (v. 7): *I am thy servant and thy son*, that is, “I will be as dutiful and obedient to thee as to a master or father, if thou wilt but do me this good turn.” Had he thus humbled himself to God, and implored his favour, he might have been delivered upon easier terms; he might have saved his money, and needed only to have parted with his sins. But, if the prodigal forsake his father's house, he soon becomes a slave to the worst of masters, <sup><1215></sup>Luke 15:15.

**(2.)** He impoverished himself; for he took the silver and gold that were laid up in the treasury both of the temple and of the kingdom, and sent it to the king of Assyria, v. 8. Both church and state must be squeezed and exhausted, to gratify this his new patron and guardian. I know not what authority he had thus to dispose of the public stock; but it is common for those that have brought themselves into straits by one sin to help themselves out by another; and those that have alienated themselves from God will make no difficulty of alienating any of his rights.

### THE REIGN OF AHAZ

Though Ahaz had himself sacrificed in high places, on hills, and under every green tree (v. 4), yet God's altar had hitherto continued in its place and in use, and the *king's burnt-offering and his meat-offering* (v. 15) had been offered upon it by the priests that attended it; but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the room of it — a bolder stroke than the worst of the kings had yet given to religion. We have here,

**I.** The model of this new altar, taken from one at Damascus, by the king himself, v. 10. The king of Assyria having taken Damascus, thither Ahaz went, to congratulate him on his success, to return him thanks for the kindness he had done him by this expedition, and, as his servant and son, to receive his commands. Had he been faithful to his God, he would not have needed to crouch thus meanly to a foreign power. At Damascus, either while viewing the rarities of the place, or rather while joining with them in their devotions (for, when he was there, he thought it no harm to do as they did), he saw an altar that pleased his fancy extremely, not such a plain old-fashioned one as that which he had been trained up in attendance upon at Jerusalem, but curiously carved, it is likely, and adorned with image-work; there were many pretty things about it which he thought significant, surprising, very charming, and calculated to excite his devotion. Solomon had but a dull fancy, he thought, compared with the ingenious artist that made this altar. Nothing will serve him but he must have an altar just like this: a pattern of it must be taken immediately; he cannot stay till he returns himself, but sends it before him in all haste, with orders to Urijah the priest to get one made exactly according to this model and have it ready against he came home. The pattern God showed to Moses in the mount or to David by the Spirit was not comparable to this pattern sent from Damascus. The hearts of idolaters walked after their eyes, which are therefore said to *go a whoring after their idols*; but the true worshippers worship the true God by faith.

**II.** The making of it by Urijah the priests, v. 11. This Urijah, it is likely, was the chief priest who at this time presided in the temple-service. To him Ahaz sent an intimation of his mind (for we read not of any express orders

he gave him), to get an altar made by this pattern. And, without any dispute or objection, he put it in hand immediately, being perhaps as fond of it as the king was, at least being very willing to humour the king and desirous to curry favour with him. Perhaps he might have this excuse for gratifying the king herein, that, by this means, he might keep him to the temple at Jerusalem and prevent his totally deserting it for the high places and the groves. "Let us oblige him in this," thinks Urijah, "and then he will bring all his sacrifices to us; for by this craft we get our living." But, whatever pretence he had, it was a most base wicked thing for him that was a priest, a chief priest, to make this altar, in compliance with an idolatrous prince, for hereby,

**1.** He prostituted his authority and profaned the crown of his priesthood, making himself a servant to the lusts of men. There is not a greater disgrace to the ministry than obsequiousness to such wicked commands as this was.

**2.** He betrayed his trust. As priest, he was bound to maintain and defend God's institutions, and to oppose and witness against all innovations; and, for him to assist and serve the king in setting up an altar to confront the altar which by divine appointment he was consecrated to minister at, was such a piece of treachery and perfidiousness as may justly render him infamous to all posterity. Had he only connived at the doing of it, — had he been frightened into it by menaces, — had he endeavoured to dissuade the king from it, or but delayed the doing of it till he came home, that he might first talk with him about it, — it would not have been so bad; but so willingly to walk after his commandment, as if he were glad of the opportunity to oblige him, was such an affront to the God he served as was utterly inexcusable.

**III.** The dedicating of it. Urijah, perceiving that the king's heart was much upon it, took care to have it ready against he came down, and set it near the brazen altar, but somewhat lower and further from the door of the temple. The king was exceedingly pleased with it, approached it with all possible veneration, and offered thereon his burnt-offering, etc., v. 12, 13. His sacrifices were not offered to the God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus (as we find ~~4083~~ 2 Chronicles 28:23), and, when he borrowed the Syrians' altar, no marvel that he borrowed their gods. Naaman, the Syrian, embraced the God of Israel when he got earth from the land of Israel to make an altar of.

**IV.** The removal of God's altar, to make room for it. Urijah was so modest that he put this altar at the lower end of the court, and left God's altar in its place, *between this and the house of the Lord*, v. 14. But that would not satisfy Ahaz; he removed God's altar to an obscure corner in the north side of the court, and put his own before the sanctuary, in the place of it. He thinks his new altar is much more stately, and much more sightly, and disgraces that; and therefore "let that be laid aside as a vessel in which there is no pleasure." His superstitious invention, at first, jostled *with* God's sacred institution, but at length jostled it *out*. Note, Those will soon come to make nothing of God that will not be content to make him their all. Ahaz durst not (perhaps for fear of the people) quite demolish the brazen altar and knock it to pieces; but, while he ordered all the sacrifices to be offered upon this new altar (v. 15), *The brazen altar* (says he) *shall be for me to enquire by*. Having thrust it out from the use for which it was instituted, which was to sanctify the gifts offered upon it, he pretends to advance it above its institution, which it is common for superstitious people to do. The altar was never designed for an oracle, yet Ahaz will have it for that use. The Romish church seemingly magnifies Christ's sacraments, yet wretchedly corrupts them. But some give another sense of Ahaz's purpose: "As for the brazen altar, I will consider what to do with it, and give order about it." The Jews say that, afterwards, of the brass of it he made that famous dial which was called *the dial of Ahaz*, <sup><2211></sup>2 Kings 20:11. The base compliance of the poor-spirited priest with the presumptuous usurpations of an ill-spirited king is again taken notice of (v. 16): *Urijah the priest did according to all that king Ahaz commanded*. Miserable is the case of great men when those that should reprove them for their sins strengthen and serve them in their sins.

## ~~<1267>~~ 2 KINGS 16:17-20

### THE REIGN OF AHAZ

Here is,

**I.** Ahaz abusing the temple, not the building itself, but some of the furniture of it.

**1.** He defaced the bases on which the lavers were set (~~1Kings~~ 1 Kings 7:28, 29) and took down the molten sea, v. 17. These the priests used for washing; against them therefore he seems to have had a particular spite. It is one of the greatest prejudices that can be done to religion to obstruct the purifying of the priests, the Lord's ministers.

**2.** He removed *the covert for the sabbath*, erected either in honour of the sabbath or for the conveniency of the priests, when, on the sabbath, they officiated in greater numbers than on other days. Whatever it was, it should seem that in removing it he intended to put a contempt upon the sabbath, and so to open as wide an inlet as any to all manner of impiety.

**3.** The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, for the convenience of the royal family (perhaps that ascent which Solomon had made, and which the queen of Sheba admired, ~~1Kings~~ 1 Kings 10:5), he turned another way, to show that he did not intend to frequent the house of the Lord any more. This he did for the king of Assyria, to oblige him, who perhaps returned his visit, and found fault with this entry, as an inconvenience and disparagement to his palace. When those that have had a ready passage to the house of the Lord, to please their neighbours, turn it another way, they are going down the hill apace towards their ruin.

**II.** Ahaz resigning his life in the midst of his days, at thirty-six years of age (v. 19) and leaving his kingdom to a better man, Hezekiah his son (v. 20), who proved as much a friend to the temple as he had been an enemy to it. Perhaps this very son he had made to pass through the fire, and thereby dedicated him to Moloch; but God, by his grace, snatched him as a brand out of the burning.