

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

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The Reign of Ahaz, part 1: Opening of Ahaz's Reign (2 Chronicles 28:1-5)

The Reign of Ahaz (28:1-27)

The Chronicler's record of Ahaz's reign (735 - 716/15 B.C.) presents a mirror image of Jotham's ideal kingdom (27:1-9). In the book of Chronicles, Ahaz represented the worst of Judah's kings. His life conveyed to the original post-exilic readers the results of a life of disloyalty to God, even on the heels of a time greatly blessed by God.

Comparison of 28:1-27 with 2 Kgs 16:1-20

The relationship between the account of Ahaz in Kings and Chronicles is complex. A number of insignificant stylistic and text critical issues appear, but several important differences occur as well (see figure 49).

First, in his usual fashion the Chronicler omitted 2 Kgs 16:1, a synchronization with the northern kingdom (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Second, several additional materials and expansions illustrate the flagrant character of Ahaz's apostasy. 1) 28:2b-3 mentions images of Baals and Ahaz's worship of them. 2) In 28:5 the Chronicler expanded the parallel in 2 Kgs 16:5 to attribute these events to divine purposes. He added that the victory of Syria over Judah occurred because **the Lord his God handed him over to the king of Aram** (28:5). Moreover, he stated that Ahaz **was given into the hands of the king of Israel** (i.e. by God) (28:5). The Chronicler frequently attributed dramatic events to the action of God (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Moreover, in this verse the Chronicler also shifted attention away from the failed Syrian-Israelite attempt to capture Jerusalem (2 Kgs 16:5) to note that both Syria and Israel inflicted terrible losses on Judah (28:5). 3) Chronicles also adds a description of conflict between Ahaz and the northern Israelites (28:6-15). These expansions depicted the severity of divine judgment against Ahaz and portrayed northern Israelites as more righteous than Ahaz. 4) The record of Edom's victory against Judah at Elath is expanded to depict this event as the cause of Ahaz's humiliation and

his motivation for seeking help from Assyria. As such, it forms another illustration of severe divine judgment against Ahaz's apostasy (28:17-21 // 2 Kgs 16:6-8). 5) The Chronicler abbreviated the episode in 2 Kgs 16:10-18 which focused on the cooperation between Ahaz and Uriah the priest in bringing Assyrian religious practices to Jerusalem. Instead, his shorter version of the events places responsibility entirely upon Ahaz (28:22-23). This change also fits the event into a series of acts in which Ahaz sought help from someone other than his God. 6) The Chronicler added a report of Ahaz's total cessation from the worship of the Lord (28:24-25). In this section he also added that this apostasy **provoked the Lord, the God of his fathers, to anger** (28:25).

2 Chr		2 Kgs
-----	Synchronization with North (omitted)	16:1
28:1-5	Opening of Ahaz's Reign (expanded)	16:2-5
28:6-15	Northern Fidelity to God (added)	-----
28:16-25	Ahaz's Infidelity to God (loosely parallel)	16:6-18
28:26-27	Closure of Ahaz's Reign (parallel)	16:19-20

Comparison of 2 Chr 28:1-27 with 2 Kgs 16:1-20 (figure 49)

Third, in order to dishonor Ahaz, the Chronicler omitted the notice of 2 Kgs 16:20 that Ahaz was buried "with his fathers." Instead, he clarified that this did not mean that Ahaz enjoyed an honorable burial in the royal tombs. He added that **he was not placed in the tombs of the kings of Israel** (28:27). This change was consistent with the Chronicler's negative assessment of Ahaz's reign.

Structure of 28:1-27

The Chronicler's variations from the account of Kings shapes his record into four main sections. These portions of Ahaz's reign give a striking portrait of the king's apostasy (see figure 50).

Opening of Ahaz's Reign (28:1-5)

Northern Israel's Fidelity to God (28:6-15)

Victorious Israel Takes Plunder and Prisoners (28:6-8)

Israel Receives Prophetic Rebuke (28:9-11)

Israel Responds to Prophetic Rebuke (28:12-13)

Victorious Israel Returns Plunder and Prisoners (28:14-15)

Ahaz's Infidelity to God (28:16-25)

Ahaz Fails to Receive Help from Assyria (28:16-21)

Ahaz's Initial Appeal to Assyria (28:16-20)

Ahaz Seeks Assyrian Help (28:16)

[Explanation of Ahaz's Actions (28:17-19)]

Ahaz Receives Negative Response (28:20)

Ahaz's Further Appeal to Assyria (28:21)

Ahaz Intensely Seeks Assyrian Help (28:21a)

Ahaz Receives Further Negative Responses (28:21b)

Ahaz Fails to Receive Help from Syrian Gods (28:22-25)

Ahaz's Increasing Infidelity (28:22)

Ahaz's Worship of Syrian Gods (28:23a)

Ahaz's Downfall Explained (28:23b)

Ahaz's Further Worship of Other Gods (28:24-25a)

Ahaz's Judgment (28:25b)

Closure of Ahaz's Reign (28:26-27)

Outline of 2 Chr 28:1-27 (figure 50)

The Chronicler's portrait of Ahaz is straightforward. He opened the reign with an overview of the king's sinful practices (28:1-5) and closed with a summation of his dishonorable end (28:26-27). The main body of the record divides between a story illustrating not only Ahaz's defeat, but also the relative piety of northern Israelites (28:6-15). This episode is followed by another narrative which depicts the utter apostasy of the Judean king Ahaz (28:16-25). By this means, the Chronicler portrayed Ahaz as the worst of Judah's kings during the divided period.

Opening of Ahaz's Reign (28:1-5)

As noted above, the Chronicler expanded the record of 2 Kgs 16:2-4 in a number of ways in 28:1-5. This material consists of notices and reports that characterize the entire reign of Ahaz.

The initial notice seems ordinary enough at first glance. Ahaz was **twenty** at the time of his accession **and he reigned ... sixteen years** (28:1). Nevertheless, this information is difficult to reconcile with the notice that the son of Ahaz, Hezekiah, was twenty-five when he came to the throne at the end of Ahaz's sixteen year reign (see 29:1). If these numbers are taken at face value, it would mean that Ahaz became a father at eleven years old. While such an early paternity is not absolutely impossible, it would be unique in the biblical record. Surprisingly, however, no special comment is offered in Kings or Chronicles to explain the matter. The lack of comment suggests the possibility that the ages and/or lengths of reigns have been corrupted in one way or another at some stage(s) of textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). In all events, the reconstruction of precise dating for the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah presents one of the most difficult problems of biblical chronology.

The text wastes no time in giving the reader an evaluation of Ahaz. In terminology appearing frequently in Kings and Chronicles, we are told that Ahaz **did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord** (28:1 // 2 Kgs 16:2). For the Chronicler's use of this evaluative terminology see comments on 24:2.

In addition to this normal way of evaluating a king, the text also adds that Ahaz was **unlike David his father** (28:1). This is the only example of the Chronicler negatively comparing a Judean king with David (compare 2 Chr 17:3; 29:2; 34:2). As such, this passage set Ahaz in direct opposition to the Chronicler's ideal king David (see *Introduction: 14 Standards*). As we will see, Ahaz represented the very opposite of what a king of Judah should be.

The striking contrast between Ahaz and David is supported by the words that follow. Ahaz **walked in the ways of the kings of Israel** (28:2). In Chronicles as in the book of Kings, this comparison is a harsh condemnation. As we have seen a number of times, the Chronicler held out hope for the northern kingdom, but he also characterized northern Israel as apostate. To associate Asa with these kings was to portray him in very strong negative terms (see *Introduction: 2 Northern Israel*).

To illustrate what he meant, the Chronicler provided a catalogue of Ahaz's terrible disobedience. First, he added to the record of Kings that Ahaz **made cast idols for worshipping the Baals** (28:2b) and offered **sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom** (28:3a).

Second, he followed Kings and reported that Ahaz **sacrificed his sons** (28:3b). The traditional Hebrew text of 28:3b reads "his sons" and the traditional Hebrew text of 2 Kgs 16:3b reads "his son." Yet, this difference is probably a problem in textual transmission and not the Chronicler's intentional change (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

Child sacrifice was strongly forbidden by Mosaic Law (see Lev 18:21; 20:2-4; Deut 12:31). This sin is described as **the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites** (28:3b). The Chronicler compared the people of God to the Canaanites a number of times. For the Chronicler's use of this comparison see comments on 33:2-9. Ahaz had become as evil as the Canaanites of long ago whose evil practices had brought the divine judgment of Israel's conquest against them (see Gen 15:18-21; Deut 18:9).

Third, Ahaz also involved himself in a vast array of pagan worship practices. He **sacrificed and burned incense at the high places ... hilltops ... and spreading trees** (28:4). Such practices were strongly condemned by Israel's prophets and represent serious violations of Ahaz' fidelity to his God. In the Chronicler's history Ahaz was the worst of Judah's apostate kings.

The Chronicler followed his catalogue of Ahaz's sins with brief reports of Judah's defeats before Syria and northern Israel (28:5). In the last years of Jotham and during the reign of Ahaz, Judah was troubled by enemies from the north. King Rezin of Syria and king Pekah of northern Israel joined forces against Assyria. To secure their position against the stronger army of Assyria, Syria and Israel pressured Judah to join their coalition (see 2 Kgs 16:5-7; Isa 7:1-6). Under the influence of the prophet Isaiah (see Isa 7:1-6), Ahaz refused to join the Syrian-Israelite coalition. Contrary to the advice of Isaiah, however, Ahaz sought help from Assyria and became a vassal of the Assyrian emperor. This action demonstrated his refusal to rely on the Lord for help against his enemies and eventually brought great trouble to Judah. In the meanwhile, Syria and Israel attacked Judah a number of times in an attempt to force Ahaz into submission.

The Chronicler's record of Ahaz's defeats before Syria and northern Israel is shaped to convey his theological perspective. 2 Kgs 16:5 merely notes that the attacks occurred. The Chronicler, however, added that Syria was victorious because **the Lord his God handed him over to the king of Aram** (28:5a). Similarly, he noted that Ahaz **was also given into the hands of the king of Israel** (28:5b). These additions make it clear that the Chronicler saw these events as another example of divine judgment against Ahaz for the preceding catalogue of sins (see 28:2-4; see also *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

Moreover, just as the Chronicler highlighted the severity of Ahaz's infidelity (28:2), he also added that the defeats of Judah were severe. 2 Kgs 16:5 merely reports that the kings of Syria and Israel tried to conquer Jerusalem. The Chronicler, however, drew attention away from the sparing of Jerusalem itself to severe losses elsewhere. He noted that the **Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners ... to Damascus** (28:5a). He also pointed out that the king of northern Israel **inflicted heavy casualties** on Ahaz (28:5b). In effect, Judah experienced a small exile during Ahaz's reign. This fact comes into view once again in Hezekiah's reign (see 29:9).

The purpose of these variations from the book of Kings is evident. The Chronicler wanted his post-exilic readers to understand that Ahaz's sins had not gone unpunished. His troubles were the result of divine judgment. After the tremendous blessings given to Jotham for his unwavering fidelity, the judgment against the apostate Ahaz should have struck fear in the hearts of the Chronicler's readers. Blessings in the past were no assurance of blessings in the future. Each generation stood responsible for its own actions (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).