

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

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### **The Reign of Ahaz, part 3: Ahaz's Infidelity to God; Closure of Ahaz's Reign (2 Chronicles 28:16-27)**

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

After his surprising story about the repentance and faithfulness of northern Israelites, the Chronicler pointed to an ironic contrast in the behavior of Ahaz. At a time when Israelites were obedient to God, Judah's king turned away from God. As we have seen above, much of the basic information contained in this material appears in 2 Kgs 16:6-18. The Chronicler, however, replaced 2 Kgs 16:7b-8 with 28:17-20 to explain why Ahaz's kingdom declined. He also summarized 2 Kgs 16:14-18 in 28:23. Finally, 28:24-25 were added to depict the nadir of Ahaz's apostasy as the cause of severe divine judgment against Judah (see figure 50).

#### *Structure of 28:16-25*

The account of Ahaz's infidelity divides into two main sections (see figure 50). These passages record events which display an increasing apostasy in Ahaz's life. He first turned to the king of Assyria for help (28:17-21); second, he turned to the gods of Syria (28:22-25). In the end, he found himself the recipient of severe divine anger.

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

The Chronicler related Ahaz's appeal to the king of Assyria in two episodes (28:16-20 and 28:21; see figure 50).

#### *Ahaz's Initial Appeal to Assyria (28:16-19)*

The skeleton of the first episode consists of two steps: 28:16 and 20. 28:17-19 comprises a parenthetical explanation.

*Ahaz Seeks Assyrian Help (28:16)*

This two step story begins with Ahaz appealing to **the king of Assyria for help** (28:16). The term **help** is repeated no less than three times in this section (see 28:16,20,21, [see also 28:23 (twice)]). This terminology appears a number of times in Chronicles to describe extraordinary assistance from God for his servants (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). To find help from anyone but God was to rebel against God. In this regard, the Chronicler's perspective was very similar to that of Isaiah (see Isa 30:1-5; 31:1-3). Only God was to be the source of help for the people of God, but Ahaz turned to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria for assistance instead.

*Ahaz's Actions Explained (28:17-18)*

Why did Ahaz need help? The Chronicler inserted a parenthetical explanation of the king's desire (28:17-18). The book of Kings focuses on the attacks of Israel and Syria against Ahaz as the basis of Ahaz's need for Assyrian assistance (see 2 Kgs 16:7). The Chronicler, however, reported Ahaz's troubles in the south and west. The **Edomites** (28:17) and **Philistines** (28:18) attacked Judah and took many prisoners. These armies took advantage of Judah's preoccupation with her northern enemies (Syria and Israel) and reasserted their own claims against Judah's southern and western borders.

The Chronicler, however, was not satisfied to leave the matter in purely human terms. He explained that these attacks were successful because **the Lord had humbled Judah** (28:19). Divine purposes were behind these events (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Self-imposed humility was a positive quality for the people of God to exhibit (see *Introduction: 18) Humility*). Ahaz's humiliation, however, was imposed on him by God; for this reason the terminology does not bear the positive connotations as it does in other passages.

Beyond this, the Chronicler made it clear why God humiliated Ahaz through these defeats. It was because **he had promoted wickedness and had been most unfaithful to the Lord** (28:19). The Chronicler had already catalogued Ahaz's wicked deeds (see 28:1-4); here he added that the king was **unfaithful**, a term which he frequently used to indicate flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with God (see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*). In this parenthetical aside, the Chronicler made it clear that Ahaz found himself in need of help because his sins had turned God against him.

*Ahaz Receives Negative Response (28:20)*

28:20 picks up the narrative sequence from 28:16 by describing the response of Assyria's king. In 734 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III subjugated Israel and came as far south as the regions of Judah. His presence was a mixed experience for Ahaz. It relieved him of trouble from the North, but it also placed Ahaz in a position of dependence on Assyria (see 2 Kgs 16:10,17-18). In this sense, the Assyrian king

**gave him trouble, instead of help** (28:20). Although Ahaz had sought help from Assyria, he received none because genuine help comes only from God (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

In this short episode, the Chronicler demonstrated the futility of Ahaz's efforts. His attempt to acquire help from someone other than the Lord failed miserably. In fact, he brought himself into more trouble.

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

The second episode in this section (28:21) intensifies the outcome of the first. It too divides into a two step presentation (see figure 50).

#### *Ahaz Intensely Seeks Assyrian Help (28:21a)*

In an effort to gain the approval of Tiglath-Pileser III, Ahaz gave the Assyrians some of the treasures **from the temple ... the royal palace ... and from the princes** (28:21a). Giving enormous tributes to Suzerains was required for the protection the Suzerains provided their vassals. To pay a tribute of this sort was an acknowledgment of vassalage, a curse on Judah (see *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*).

#### *Ahaz Receives Further Negative Response (28:21b)*

Despite Ahaz's efforts, the king of Assyria still **did not help him** (28:21). In fact, Ahaz had to rob the temple (see also 28:24), as well as others, to pay for his dependence on Assyria (see *Introduction: 9) Temple Contributions*). The cost of Ahaz's infidelity was great. By this example, the Chronicler noted the failure that was sure to follow if his post-exilic readers sought alliances with foreign powers instead of relying on God (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

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

In this section the Chronicler gave an account of another way in which Ahaz sought help from someone other than his God. This time he turned to the gods of Syria.

#### *Structure of 28:22-25*

This account divides into five symmetrical steps (see figure 50). Ahaz increases his rebellion (28:22) and receives God's judgment in the end (28:25b). His worship of the Syrian gods (28:23a) is

balanced by further syncretism (28:25a). The middle portion of the episode explains that his worship of other gods caused Judah's downfall (28:23b).

#### *Ahaz's Increasing Infidelity (28:22)*

In the first step, the Chronicler began with the notice that this time Ahaz was **unfaithful to the Lord** (28:22). The theme of infidelity has already been introduced in the preceding episodes (28:19). The purpose of this story was to show that he had become **even more unfaithful** than before (28:22; see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*).

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

The second step (28:23a) focuses on Ahaz's **sacrifices to the gods of Damascus**, the capital of Syria (28:23). Instead of seeking help from a human king, Ahaz reasoned that the gods of Syria **helped** the Syrians (28:23). Therefore, sacrifices will move them to **help** him as well (28:23). The pursuit of **help** is central in this episode as it was in the preceding section (see 28:16-21). Ahaz turned away from the Lord as his source of help once again (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

#### *Ahaz's Downfall Explained (28:23b)*

The third step (28:23b) forms a turning point in the episode. Although Ahaz sought help from the Syrian gods, they **were his downfall and the downfall of all Israel** (28:23b). The desire to gain assistance from foreign gods brought about a terrible turn of events for Ahaz and the nation.

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

The fourth step balances with the second portion of this episode in that it returns to the theme of sacrifice and worship (28:24-25a). To demonstrate the depth of Ahaz's apostasy the Chronicler noted that the king stopped all worship of the Lord. He went so far as to remove **the furnishings from the temple** for use in pagan worship and **shut the doors of the Lord's temple** (28:24; see 28:21). Beyond this, his devotion to other gods was so thorough that the king **set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem** (28:24) and **in every town in Judah he built high places and sacrificed** (28:25a; see 21:11; 33:3). The Chronicler's outlook is evident, Ahaz had sunk so far into infidelity that he no longer even made pretense of serving the God of his fathers. He had completely turned **to other gods** (28:25a).

*Ahaz's Judgment (28:25b)*

The final step balances with the opening of the story in that it returns to the matter of Ahaz and the God of Israel (28:25b). Because he had been **even more unfaithful** (28:22), he **provoked the Lord ... to anger** (28:25b). The king's flagrant rebellion against God had made him the object of God's judgment.

Contrary to his usual practice, the Chronicler did not spell out how the great anger of God showed itself in Ahaz's reign. His goal was reached merely by establishing that Ahaz had become an apostate and incurred divine wrath.

The record of Ahaz is shaped to make it clear that Judah's condition had worsened to the point that the southern kingdom was no more faithful than northern Israel. Earlier in the history, king Abijah accused the Northerners of apostasy and rebellion against the God of their fathers (see 13:4-12). At this time, Ahaz had taken Judah into the very same kinds of rebellion. In fact, northern Israelites had shown themselves to be humble before the Lord at a time when apostasy was widespread in the South (see 28:5-15). Judah's special status had diminished to the point that something new was on the horizon for the people of God. That new order would come in the reign of Hezekiah (see 29:1-32:33). In his kingdom, the faithful of the North and the South joined together symbolically to form a reunited kingdom.

The Chronicler's outlook on Ahaz's reign spoke to several dimensions of the post-exilic situation. First, the restored community consisted of members of the northern tribes as well as Judahites (see 1 Chr 9:3). By noting the contrast between Ahaz's rank apostasy and northern Israel's fidelity, the legitimacy of all members of the post-exilic community was established. Moreover, the returnees should learn from this contrast that the restored community still faced the dangers of infidelity like Ahaz and those tribes outside the restored community may still find the favor of God through repentance.

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

The Chronicler returned to the record of 2 Kgs 16:19-20 to close out the reign of Ahaz. He followed Kings closely for the most part, noting sources, the king's death, and his successor (28:26-27). At one point, however, the Chronicler made his outlook on Ahaz evident once again. 2 Kgs 16:20 notes that Ahaz "rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of David." The Chronicler wanted his readers to understand that in Ahaz's case this notice did not mean he was buried in the royal tombs. For this reason, he added that **he was not placed in the tombs of the kings of Israel** (28:27). As in several other reigns (see 21:20; 24:25; 26:23; 33:20), the Chronicler noted the dishonor of Ahaz's final resting place (see *Introduction: 28) Healing and Long Life/Sickness and Death*).