

This chapter describes the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, who delved so deeply into idolatry that the writer describes Ahaz as “this is that Ahaz” (v. 22), implying that his name had become infamous in Judah’s history. As king, Ahaz’s sins had more than a personal impact. The influence of the king’s sins also caused the nation of Judah to suffer militarily, economically and spiritually.

1 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: 2 For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim.

“Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem” – Ahaz seems to have had a relatively short reign as king with his death at 36. His sinful lifestyle may have led to a shortened lifespan.

“but he did not *that which* was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father” – Ahaz did not follow the example of his ancestor David, who had served the LORD with all of his heart.

“For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel” – Instead, Ahaz followed the example of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, who were notorious for engaging in idolatry instead of following the LORD.

“and made also molten images for Baalim” – “Baalim” is plural for “Baal,” indicating that Ahaz not only worshiped the Baal family of gods but created additional images of them to be distributed around Judah for worship by the public. As king, Ahaz’s religion was not merely a private matter but influenced the people to also become idolaters.

3 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. 4 He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

Besides the Baalim, Ahaz also worshiped Molech, the god of the Ammonites, who was worshiped in the valley of Hinnom. This worship took the form of burning incense and offering his own children to Molech in a fire ritual. He followed the pagan practices of the heathen by worshiping in elevated places and under trees. These were the sins that the LORD had judged the Canaanite nations for when He displaced them so that Israel could inherit the promised land. The LORD also warned that He would judge Israel if they practiced these same sins (Deut. 12:29-31; Lev. 20:1-5).

5 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. 6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, *which were* all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers.

“Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria” – The writer places the blame for Judah’s oppression by Syria squarely on Ahaz. It was because of his sins of idolatry that the LORD allowed the king of Syria to defeat Judah. **“and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought *them* to Damascus”** – Syria captured “a great multitude” of Judeans and took them back to their capital of Damascus, likely as either hostages or slaves.

“And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter” – God also punished Ahaz by giving the northern kingdom of Israel a military victory over Judah, resulting in a large number of Judean soldiers being killed.

“For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, *which were* all valiant [strong] men” – Pekah was the king of Israel, and his army killed 120,000 Judean soldiers, presumably in a single battle. These slain soldiers were not the weakest in Judah’s army, but are described as “valiant men.” It was another major defeat for Judah to lose these strong and capable soldiers.

“because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers” – The writer again declares that the reason for these military defeats was because of Judah’s abandonment of the worship of the LORD. By doing so, they had forfeited His protection and help.

Verses 7-8: During the battle with Israel, people significant to Ahaz were also killed: his son, the manager of his household and finances, and his second-in-command. In the aftermath of the battle, Israel carried away 200,000 women and children along with “much spoil.” The consequences of Ahaz’s idolatry were growing.

9 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.

“But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria” – The Israelite army had gone overboard in their defeat of Judah, and the LORD sent a prophet to meet the Israelite army as they were returning to Samaria (the capital of Israel) with the 200,000 Israelite captives.

“and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand” – Israel’s victory over Judah was not because of their military strength or clever battle strategy. They were victorious only because the LORD was punishing Judah for turning away from Him.

“and ye have slain them in a rage *that* reacheth up unto heaven” – Israel had not just defeated Judah, but they had apparently viciously killed more enemy soldiers than necessary and had taken their women and children captive as slaves. The excessiveness of Israel’s actions was prompting the LORD to take action.

10 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?

“And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you” – The LORD knew that Israel was planning on keeping these 200,000 women and children as slaves, but this was beyond what the LORD intended as a punishment for Judah. It also was improper considering the fact that Israel and Judah were sister nations.

“but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God?” – Israel ought to be humble in their victory because they also had forsaken the LORD and were candidates to be the next targets in God’s judgment. He could easily send another enemy nation who could inflict as much damage or more against Israel.

11 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.

The prophet Oded warns Israel that wrath of the LORD is about to fall on them because of the excessive way they have dealt with their sister nation of Judah. Oded urges that they return the captives to Judah before the LORD judges Israel.

Verses 12-20: Certain leaders of Israel also protested and refused to allow the Israelite army to bring these captives into the city of Samaria. They said that the Israel’s soldiers were adding to the sins of Israel and bringing the LORD’s fierce wrath upon them. The soldiers responded by surrendering the captives and the spoil that they had taken from Judah to these leaders to do with as they saw fit. These leaders then used the spoils to make sure that all of the captives had clothes, shoes and food before taking them to Jericho to be returned to Judah. After this, Ahaz began having more trouble from enemy nations and appealed to the kings of Assyria for help. Edom and the Philistines began invading Judah and taking captives, along with Assyria, who decided not to help Ahaz. All of these troubles were the result of Ahaz’s sins and his idolatrous influence on Judah.

21 For Ahaz took away a portion *out* of the house of the LORD, and *out* of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave *it* unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not.

There were so many enemy nations harassing Judah that Ahaz sent a monetary gift to the king of Assyria in the hopes of convincing him to help. The gift was comprised of money Ahaz took from the temple treasury, along with his own money and contributions from the princes of Judah. Ahaz was not willing to ask the LORD Himself for help, but he was not above pulling money out of the treasury of the LORD’s house to obtain help from Assyria. However, the king of Assyria declined to respond to Ahaz’s plea for help.

22 And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this *is that* king Ahaz. 23 For 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.

“And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD” – Even in this desperate time Ahaz still did not turn to the LORD but went even deeper into idolatry.

“this *is that* king Ahaz” – This phrase may imply that the name “Ahaz” had acquired a negative connotation in Judean history, much like the name “Benedict Arnold” has in American history. The writer may be pointing out what a terrible king Ahaz was.

“For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him” – Damascus was the capital of Syria and Ahaz believed their advantage over Judah was because of the gods that were worshiped in that city. He apparently never seriously considered that his helplessness against Syria and the other nations oppressing him was because of his sins.

“and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, *therefore* will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me” – Ahaz mistakenly thinks that the Syrian victories over Judah was because they had “superior” gods. He believed that if he started worshipping these gods then they would show him favor and help Judah against the Syrians and other oppressing enemy nations.

“But they were the *ruin* [to stumble; to cause to fall] of him, and of all Israel” – Ahaz’s misdiagnosis of the problem leads to his downfall and causes the rest of the nation to stumble. Instead of addressing the true cause of Judah’s problems (the fact that they had turned from the LORD), Ahaz actually made things worse by continuing deeper into idolatry.

24 And Ahaz 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, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

Turning from the LORD was the source of Judah’s problems but Ahaz discouraged the worship of the LORD by looting the temple and shutting its doors so that the priests could not perform their duties. He apparently had already emptied the temple treasury (v. 21), so removed all the utensils and other articles that had been used in the worship of the LORD, cutting them up to use them as raw material for creating pagan altars to worship other gods. He then placed these pagan altars all over Jerusalem to make it easier to worship these gods than to worship the LORD. The Mosaic Law dictated that offerings could only be made at the temple, but Ahaz created altars for false gods so that sacrifices to these gods could be made anywhere.

Verses 25-27: Ahaz also established “high places” (elevated places devoted to idolatry) in other Judean cities to promote the worship of other gods, further provoking the anger of the LORD. When he died, Ahaz was not afforded the honor of being buried in the royal sepulchers of the kings. Whoever was in charge of his funeral arrangements apparently recognized how much damage Ahaz had done to Judea because of his idolatry and denied him the usual royal honors. Perhaps this was Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, who was one of Judah’s Godliest kings in contrast to his father, who was one of Judah’s most ungodly kings.