

Ahaz, a "No Good" Leader

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[0 : 00] Turning this morning to 2nd Chronicles chapter 28. Here we have the account of King Ahaz.

As we're looking at this gallery, the portraits that we have of these kings in 2nd Chronicles. Once again we're missing out a few of the portraits since the last one we saw in Joash.

Amaziah in chapter 25 and then Uzziah in chapter 26 as well. And Jotham in chapter 27. We're skipping over these not because they're not important.

But we just can't spend time on all of these portraits. And some of them have quite a lot of similar features in them. When we come to Ahaz, it's not often that in these portraits of the kings there is no good feature at all set out for us.

In other words, there's not many of the kings in 2nd Chronicles have absolutely nothing good said about them. But Ahaz is one of them. He's one of, that's why we've called him, one of the no goods.

[1 : 08] There's absolutely nothing good said about Ahaz in the whole of the record of this chapter. Ahaz has nothing good said about him.

And that really tells you the kind of man he was in the way that the Chronicles actually set out the features of these reigns of these kings. The background to his time on the throne is itself important. And we can just spend a couple of minutes, a few thoughts because we need to fill in sometimes the background order to understand some of the things that are going on in the chapter. This was a time when the empire of Assyria was really on the ascendancy.

And there's a king mentioned in this chapter, Tiglath-Pileser. He was Tiglath-Pileser III. He was one of the big, the great Assyrian kings. And under him the Assyrian empire expanded hugely.

And they went all the way across to overrun these kingdoms like Judah and Israel and the kingdoms of round about the Moab, Adam. All of these smaller kingdoms came very much under the empire of Assyria.

[2 : 51] Or at least most of them did. We'll see Hezekiah in Judah through the leadership of Isaiah and Micah resisted him and trusted in God.

So during this period, that's what was going on. And Syria and Ephraim of Israel, the northern kingdom, they had entered into an alliance.

Because they saw the threat coming from the Assyrians. So they got together and said, well, we're stronger together. So that's why you read about the Assyrians and the Israelites, the northern kingdom of Israel, in the middle part of the chapter here, that defeated Judah.

Because Judah had become so weak spiritually and morally under the bad leadership of Ahaz. Now the prophets, if you look at the section of the Bible where you have the prophecy, the major prophets and the minor prophets.

The prophets that operated round about this time, as you can see from the introduction to these prophets, the first few verses, tell you usually which kings were in place when these prophets had been sent by God to prophesy, to convey His word to the people of the time.

[4 : 06] And in this period you have Isaiah, one of the great prophets. You have Micah as well. Both of these prophets were prophets in Judah, the southern kingdom. As well as that you had Hosea and Amos, who were prophets in the northern kingdom mostly.

But all of these prophets operated. And indeed as we'll see from this chapter, the Lord had others as well. Although there was a time in Israel, as well as in Judah, of huge decline and huge spiritual decay.

And going away from the ways of the Lord and a massive increase in ideology. The Lord kept up His witness to them by various, not just prophets, major prophets.

But also some prophets who aren't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. But in these chapters in Chronicles and Kings, the man Oded is one of them. That itself reminds us that God keeps a witness to Himself even in the really bad times.

And you've only got to look at the circumstances in the history of our own country. And in Europe and elsewhere in the world where that has also been the case.

[5 : 14] So that's something of the background to what's happening in the days of Ayaz. And there are two things that we really want to look at from this portrait. There's first of all, His faithless corruption of worship.

His faithless corruption of worship, you find that described in the first four verses or so. And then the rest of the chapter really is, you could say, taken up with His fruitless search for help.

He really is looking for help. But He's looking in all the wrong places. And the only place that He will really find help in is God.

And that's where He doesn't go. And that's why His reign was such a disaster. Because He refused to look to God for help. And searched for help everywhere else.

Well, you can see there's a lot of lessons in that for ourselves as well. So let's look first of all at His faithless corruption of worship. He even made metal images for the Baals.

[6 : 21] And He made offerings in the valley of the Son of Haman and burnt His sons as an offering according to the abomination of the nations which the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

It was innovative. This was new. He made metal images for the Baals, for these gods of the Canaanites.

And as He made these metal images for them, this was something that He was introducing as something innovative, something new, something that hadn't been done before.

And that, of course, is not wrong in itself to have an innovative mind, to have a creative mind. To have a creative mind, even when you come to things like religion and how you present the gospel and how you come to relate to God and seek to convey the truth of God to whatever generation you're in.

But an innovative mind or a creative mind, if it is not controlled by and directed by and steered by God and by the Word of God, which was not the case with Ahaz, then it's going to go into all kinds of excess.

[7 : 27] And you can see it in every area of life. We have many innovative features in our own particular day in the development of technology.

Let's just think of one area where you find innovation and things which are new and which have been introduced with good motives and yet are not directed by the principles and by the teaching of God's Word.

Take genetics. Take where you've got the kind of experimentation you have with embryos. With things which are designed to lead in medical exploration and advance to treatment for various diseases, for deformities, for all that sort of thing.

And from that perspective you can understand where this is coming from. You can understand why people are concerned to find cures even and certainly remedies in some way for these serious issues to do with our health.

But where human life comes to be expendable and something which is itself not regarded even as human life.

[8 : 53] That you see is innovation going too far, isn't it? It's contrary to the important principle of scripture that human life is to be protected and nourished and nurtured.

Even unborn, fetal human life. So innovation is one thing, but innovation not guided by the Word of God or the principles of the Word of God is something else.

And then you find the same, of course, when you come to religion, when you come to worship, when you come to the worship of God. Here is a man who is not against worshipping God as such, who is not against the religion that his people have had for centuries as handed to them by Jehovah, their covenant God.

But his important things which are new to the practice of that religion and have not been themselves advocated by the Word of God. Indeed it's more than that.

The worship of the Baals, because they're an alternative to God, is something which God specifically says is absolutely not acceptable. And yet here is a man leading these people in Judah who is creatively bringing in metal images for the Baals.

[10:17] You see, innovation, creativity is fine as long as it is controlled by and subject to the Word of God. And when you think about our own religion, the religious life of our country, I mean, well over the last number of decades, you've had a steady erosion on the place given to the Christian faith.

To the Christian faith as taught by this Bible as it is in Christ Jesus, the exclusive Savior, the way, the truth and the life.

And as we'll see in a minute, it's one thing to put other things alongside of that, but pretty soon, the things you put alongside of Christ and Christ alone for salvation are very soon going to push Christ out the door.

And you're going to be left with these other things instead. Things like, well, innovations like things that are borrowed from Far East philosophies, for example.

Things that you find in Hinduism or some of the mystic religions of the East. And people are still saying to us, yeah, but we've really got to bring all of that together along with the Christian faith because that's how you get a rich tapestry of spirituality.

[11:45] Where that word is stretched out to mean far more than the Bible means by it. Well, why is it that thousands of people in the Far East are turning their backs upon their own native religions and coming to Christ?

They're being converted, we're told, in their thousands in China. Not by bringing their own native religions alongside of Christ and saying, yes, you can be part of the mix, but by them coming to see that He is the way, the truth and the life.

And that however innovative it may be, combining things together and even introducing new things to the worship of God. What you want is the truth squarely, purely, simply as it is in the Bible.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Make metal images for who you like.

Believe in whoever else you like. The problem is you will not be saved.

And salvation is the key issue. Not other issues like social or political issues, important though they may be in their own right.

[13:08] Here's a man who is innovative in leading the religion of his day. But it's an innovation which introduces what God himself has specifically outlawed.

Not only is it innovative, it's also shocking. You see what it says about the offerings that he made in the valley of the son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering.

Or made his sons pass through the fire. It really means that he introduced, and if he didn't introduce, he certainly supported human sacrifice.

The things which the Lord described, that's why the word abomination is used there. That's how the Lord saw it. That was a practice of some of the pagan nations. And here, the king of Judah, the covenant people of the living God, is introducing child or human sacrifice as an element in their worship practices.

You see, the further away from God you go, the less sensitive you are to what's offensive.

[14:24] The further you put God away from your thoughts, the more determined you are like Ahaz to go everywhere and anywhere but to God, the more your mind is going to be numbed to that which is offensive to God.

It's no surprise whatsoever for us. I know it's dangerous to make generalities, but it's no surprise whatsoever to us in our own nation to see the depth of our own depravity in terms of immorality and lifestyles.

And that which we find as Christians offensive because the Bible says they are offensive to God. It's no surprise that they're not seen to be offensive, that they're not understood to be offensive.

Why? Because God is so far distant from such practices, from such people who advocate these practices. I'm not going to specify them.

You know yourself what I'm talking about. Lifestyles and behavior which involves practices which God sees are not just wrong but are abominable.

[15:38] Why is that? Because by and large as a people, we have lost the sense of being shocked by sin.

By the sin that God describes, or sins that God describes as abominations. And when you lose from your moral consciousness the sense of being shocked, you really are a long way away from God.

And from the truth of God. As this man was. And not only that, it was innovative and it was shocking, but it was also very much a weakening, faithless corruption of worship.

Because in verses 5 to 15, you can see how weak they had become as a people. Now very often, this is how the weakness of the people is described. Because in those days, well indeed to this day as well, you've got war and rising, some nations rising up, others defeating them and so on. Still going on throughout the world, even this part of the world. Damascus is embroiled in a war right now at this time. But the way the Chronicles presents things to us is that here is the evidence that these people have become morally weakened.

[16 : 57] Because militarily, though they have the numbers, they are not superior to those nations around them. God actually doesn't give them what you'd expect to be, a victory over the likes of Syria and Israel at this time.

And we're told the reason why that is the case. In verse 6, the reason all these defeats came, and all these people were killed, of the people of Judah, and all these people were taken captive, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.

So not just saying to us, or not even primarily saying to us that these people came on top of them and attacked them, because they had abandoned God, that may be part of the picture, what it's really saying to us is, when these people came and attacked them, they were thoroughly defeated, because they had abandoned God.

They had left the God of their fathers. They had made themselves morally and spiritually weak, and therefore militarily weak, was the evidence that they were already morally and spiritually weak.

That's, you see, what's at the core of any people, when you think of, are we strong or not? How do you mean, are we strong or not? We may be strong financially, even if we're not at this present time as a nation.

[18 : 24] We may be strong politically. You might have different opinions on that. We may be strong in terms of relating ourselves to other countries in the world. People have different opinions on that.

But real strength must have as its core spiritual and moral strength. And you can only have that in obedience to God.

That's where your moral, spiritual strength comes from, as an individual, or as a society, or as a nation. That's why these people were in such poor shape.

That's why when they went out into military campaigns, at this moment, they were defeated very easily. Why? Because their core had collapsed. Their moral spine had crumpled.

They were weakened through their disobedience and departure from God. And there's an interesting, we're not going to go into it in detail, but there is an interesting episode here.

[19 : 27] And it's deliberately placed here by the Chronicles writer of something that happened when Israel, the northern kingdom, who were of course the same people as Judah, the southern kingdom, it was divided, as we saw when Rehoboam took the throne.

They took much spoil of them. They had these 200,000 captives, as well as those men that they had killed, 120,000. And they were taking them all back to Israel, to Samaria, their capital, virtually as slaves.

Which God had specifically condemned. You can go back to the book of Leviticus, you'll find there specific commands against taking any of their brothers or sisters, their own people, as slaves.

You could hire yourself out as a slave if you run into difficulties. You could actually offer yourself to be a slave to some family in Israel, but they had to release you in the seventh year or in the year of Jubilee, seven times seven.

But what you were not allowed to do was grab somebody and make them slaves. Which is what they were doing here. And Oded, this man of God, you see, there he is, remember Israel, the northern kingdom, at this time, is also equally, if not more so, away from God.

[20 : 45] It's a sad picture. And in the middle of that ungodliness, you have people like Oded, who stand up and speak the truth, who are given the strength by God and he denounced this.

He said, in fact, do you not have enough sins of your own against the Lord that you're adding this to it? But they don't seem to have listened to him, not surprisingly, but then some of their chiefs as well.

They actually reiterated what Oded had said and they listened to them. And they backed off and they actually then dealt very kindly with these people from Judah, giving them food, clothing, drink, anointing them, that means dealing with their injuries or their wounds or whatever.

And then they carried them back to Jericho, then they returned to Samaria. Why is all that given to us? Well, it's interesting in itself, but it's there so that we'll contrast the way in which Ahaz refuses to accept or listen to the word of God.

There are these men in Israel, they're in pretty bad shape as well, and yet when these people, Oded and these other chiefs were speaking to them from God's word and putting God's standard to them, they listened.

[22 : 09] They actually gave heed to that and then they acted accordingly. But then immediately it says, at that time Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help.

He sent to the king of Assyria for help. Now, I mentioned Isaiah as one of the great prophets that operated at this time. And if you go to chapter seven of Isaiah, read it through yourselves later on, but in Isaiah chapter seven, Ahaz is given the offer of asking God for a sign.

Ask it in the heavens above or in the earth beneath. In other words, Isaiah is saying to Ahaz, if you ask God for a sign to help you, to encourage you, God will give you that.

if you ask in faith, because if you go on without faith, you'll be ruined. That's pretty much what he said. And Ahaz, and it's interesting that Ahaz refused, but he refused it in the guise of godliness.

He pretended to be a very pious, a very godly man. He said, I will not test the Lord by asking for a sign. In other words, he was stubborn and refusing to have anything to do with God, even to listen to what Isaiah suggested or commended to him.

[23 : 35] But he did it in a way that pretended he was actually quite a godly man, and he had respect for God, and he didn't want to test God or put God to the test. It's all nonsense, of course.

He was just really living out a pretense. And instead of listening to Isaiah and listening to God, he sent to the king of Assyria for help.

Well, that takes us to our second point, his fruitless search for help. He turned, first of all, to the king of Assyria. There you have it in verse 16 there.

For the Edomites had again invaded, you see this is going on all the time, and the Philistines had made raids on the cities in these different areas mentioned, For the Lord humbled Judah, because of king Ahaz of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully, and had been very unfaithful to the Lord. So, take love to Lezer, king of Assyria, came against him, and, listen to this, afflicted him instead of strengthening him. See, there is Ahaz's thinking, I don't need to go to God, I don't need to listen to these religious people like Isaiah, they're somewhat fanatical, they're too narrow-minded, I'll go instead to the king of Assyria, he's the big shot in the country, he in the world, he is the world power, he is the one who really, if I make friends with him, it'll guarantee my future, it'll guarantee the future of my nation, if I make him my friend, then everything's going to be alright, what happened when he went to the king of Assyria, and the king of Assyria made him a slave, or a vassal, which is pretty much the same as being totally under his control, instead of strengthening him, is what the Chronicles writer is saying, he actually afflicted him, instead of strengthening him, he added burdens to him, it made the situation worse, you remember that woman that came to Jesus with a hemorrhage of blood, and she said within herself, if I but touch the hem of his garment,

[25 : 56] I shall be healed, I shall be made whole, but we're told about that woman that for many years she had gone from one physician to the next, and her condition hadn't improved, but had actually become worse, that's what it's like when you keep going away from the only source of help there is in God, you don't improve things, by experimenting with other sources of help, you make things worse, you actually end up giving away, as we'll see with he has, you end up giving away something of what properly belongs to God, and you give it to somebody else, that's what you find there, isn't it, because he took a portion from the house of the Lord, and the house of the king, and of the princes, and he gave it as tribute to the king of Assyria, you see, when he went to the king of Assyria, the king of Assyria smiled when he saw him coming, and said, great, this is another one in my pocket, I don't need to send an army to

Judah, I can just ask him, well, okay, you pay your taxes to me, and I'll be your friend, and he gave tribute from the house of the Lord, the things that ought to have properly been used for the worship of God, for the house of God, for the temple of God, where are they?

They're given to Tiglath Pileser, they're given to a pagan monarch, that's what happens, you see, when you go away from the source that God himself is, and you go to some alternative to God, you're then giving the devotion that you owe to God, to someone else, you're giving the things of God over to his alternative, and he turned to Syria's gods, in the time of its distress, he became yet more faithless to the Lord, the same king he has, for he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, that

had defeated him, and said, because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them, so that they may help me, but they were the ruin of him, and all Israel, now think about what's being said there, he's really saying, well, Damascus actually beat me, they overcame me, they almost finished off my army, they killed 120,000 of my soldiers, their gods must have helped them, what he's saying, of course, is our

God is pretty useless, so I'll go to their gods, he hadn't actually in his head, even given a thought it seems to the fact that these gods so called of Damascus had been absolutely useless against the king of Assyria, and yet here is Ahaz going to these gods of Damascus, because his reasoning is all over the place, he's not even thinking straight, and that's what sin, and the sin of deliberate disobedience, and going away from God more and more, that's what it really does to people, it stupefies your mind, it makes you actually do things which are seen to be stupid, by those who are in the right minds, what is more stupid than that?

A man saying, because the gods of Syria help them to defeat me, I'll go to these gods even though they were defeated by the king of Assyria, how stupid is that?

[29 : 42] That is what sin does to us, that is what progressing in sin, if you like, or going on in that deliberate, sinful, ungodly, and God dishonoring way, that's what really you end up with, you can apply that to our own circumstances as a nation, or as a society as well, but I want to just notice what it's saying here, he gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the Lord.

See what's happened? It's gone so far now that it's not just introducing the bales along with God, it's not just placing metal images of the bales in association with the worship of God, it's not just having shrines all over the place, as well as the way the temple is used as a central focus of worship, the temple is now closed.

Now you put that to the circumstances of our own day, you introduce what is false alongside what is true.

You introduce other religions alongside Christ and his religion. You place them side by side. You say there are equal validity. Let's give them equality.

Let's see them all on the same level. Let's not put them above Christianity. No, no, but let's not put Christianity above them. Let's treat them all equally and put them all together and say well you can have your choice and your choice is valid and even if you choose to put them all together that's still a valid choice and you're well on the way to really finding out the truth.

[31 : 37] No, you're well on the way to putting the truth out the door. To closing the doors of God's temple because when you put error alongside of truth, when you deliberately introduce as Ahaz did all of these things alongside the worship of God the true worship of God, you come to the point eventually if things don't change in another direction, you come to the point eventually where the truth is put out and the doors are closed.

closed. It's a sad picture but it shouldn't be a surprising one that many church buildings in our nation have long since ceased to be used for worship.

Their doors are closed to worshippers. There's doors or they've been demolished and not replaced by another church building. Now, we're not painting a picture that's absolutely dark with nothing at all to give thanks to God for, with no evidence at all of spiritual advance or church planting or whatever.

There is a lot going on in our nation, of course, in the church throughout our nation of faithful people of God praying and meeting together and worshipping and establishing new places of worship.

But, you look at the statistics. How many people are in church today in this district of Point?

Compare it with 50 years ago.

[33 : 08] You can do this on us. It's pretty obvious what's happened. Why has it happened? Well, because throughout our whole nation, that's something that of course has become even more the case than it is locally.

in our locality. But, because the truth of God itself has not been maintained and because so much else has come to be added on to it or accretions that have been added to the worship of God, to the religion of Christ, many of them well intentioned.

But, it's led to the closing of doors. Let's ask the question, why do people keep coming back to the gospel, to the truth of God, when it's declared faithfully?

Because it's the only thing that draws people's souls, that satisfies people's souls, that ultimately will bring them spiritual satisfaction.

every other alternative to it, yes, it may be very attractive for a while, but it doesn't satisfy you, it doesn't keep people interested or coming back.

[34 : 30] Only Christ can do that. Only the Lord and the truth of God can do that, which is why, finally, God's God out help.

help. Well, you notice in these verses, verses 16 and 21 and 23, the word help is used a number of times.

He sent to the king of Assyria for help, verse 21, it did not help him, verse 23, they were the ruin of him, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.

That's why we're saying Ahaz searched for help fruitlessly because he searched in all the wrong places. But I want to finish by emphasizing God out help.

There's so many psalms, some of we sang them, but you'll know yourself, so many psalms. If you look at a concordance or on your computer, if you have one, put the word help in and see how many times it comes up in the book of Psalms alone.

[35 : 37] Dozens of times, and it's specifically God is our helper. And you can see the contrast with Ahaz and what you saw in Jehoshaphat chapter 20 verse 4, what we'll see in Hezekiah as well, chapter 32, they both apply to the Lord for help in their distress, what Ahaz refused to do.

And I think one of the great summaries, if you like, is in Lamentations. The book of Lamentations, which we don't often read perhaps and certainly don't often preach from, it's a book full of great sadness, of course, but it also has things in it which are very great principles of truth.

It's written after Jerusalem has been destroyed by the Babylonians, the temple knocked to the ground, all of that disasters come upon them, and the prophets had prophesied.

And this is what it says in chapter 4 verse 17, Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help. In our watching we watched for a nation which could not save.

That is Jeremiah's conclusion, his lament. they were watching for help vainly, and in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save, because that's the crux of the issue.

[37 : 10] You need a helper who can save you. Help, in the Bible's definition of it, is the same as being saved, because God is our helper, as God is our savior.

Ahaz looked in all the wrong places for help, and he didn't find it. When he came to die, he had no helper.

And that's the saddest thing of all, perhaps, that when the time came for him to leave this world, the God that he had all these years burned and turned away from, was not his helper.

That's why for you and for me today, that's the most important issue of all. The Lord is my help and my shield, said the psalmist.

I will not be afraid, because when God is our help, God is our savior, savior, and when God is our savior, he saves us from death.

[38 : 28] Let's pray. O Lord our God, help us, we pray, for we turn to you for help, because we find our help in no other.

To whom else can we go, for you alone have the words of eternal life. We thank you, Lord, for the teaching that your word gives us, that assures us that vain is the help of man.

even though we may have assistance and appreciate it for many of the issues in this life. And although you commend to us the fellowship and the friendship and support of our fellow human beings, yet it is far short of the help that you are able to give us.

So help us now, we pray, to carry your truth into effect in our lives. Bless us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.