



## LESSON 13

# FAITH FAILURE

Israel	Judah
Jeroboam 931–910	Rehoboam 931–913
Nadab 910–909	Abijah 913–911
Baasha 909–886	Asa 911–870
Elah 886–885	
Zimri 885	
Omri 885–874	
Ahab 874–853	Jehoshaphat 873–848
Ahaziah 853–852	
Joram 852–841	Jehoram 848–841
Jehu 841–814	Ahaziah 841
	Athaliah 841–835
Jehoahaz 814–798	Joash 835–796
Jehoash 798–782	Amaziah 796–767
Jeroboam II 793–753	Uzziah 792–740
Zechariah 753	
Shallum 752	
Menahem 752–742	Jotham 750–731
Pekahiah 742–740	
Pekah 752–732	Ahaz 735–715
Hoshea 732–722	Hezekiah 729–686
	Manasseh 696–642
	Amon 642–640
	Josiah 640–609
	Jehoahaz 609
	Jehoiakim 608–598
	Jehoiachin 598–597
	Zedekiah 597–586

Israel and Judah prospered during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, but we've seen that as Assyria's ascendancy spelled trouble for the northern kingdom. Dynastic upheaval, military defeat and the loss of territory typified the time following Jeroboam II's death, and all because her rulers "did evil in the sight of the Lord... did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin" (2Kings 15.9). But what of Judah; would she put faith in her God?

### Jotham's faithfulness, but... (2Chronicles 27; 2Kings 15.32-38)

Jotham, like many of Judah's kings, began his reign as co-regent with his father. Recall that Uzziah's attempt to act as priest resulted in his being stricken with leprosy (see 2Chronicles 26.16-23). However, Jotham did not repeat his father's mistake and is commended for his faithfulness (2Chronicles 27.2). The new king was aware of the perilous times so he fortified Jerusalem and other locations throughout Judah (2Chronicles 27.3-4). And with the Lord on his side, Jotham was able to establish his supremacy over the Ammonites to the west, thus securing his control of the southern portion of the King's Highway, an important trade route.

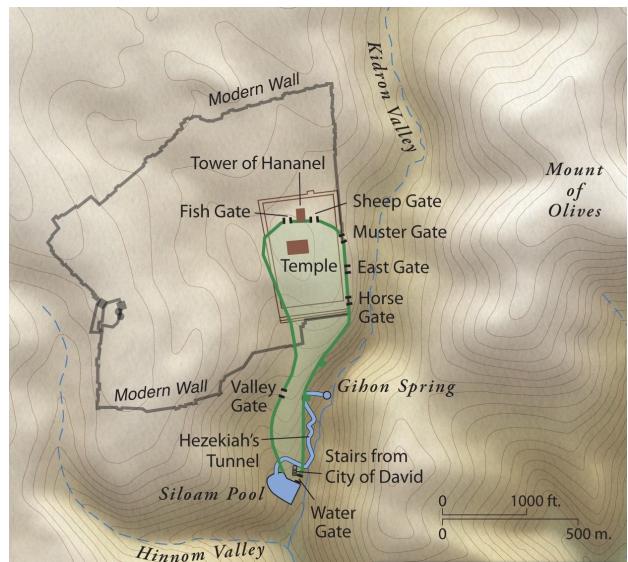
However, the text records that while Jotham was faithful, "the people continued acting corruptly" (2Chronicles 27.2). 2Kings 15.35 records that the people continued sacrificing on the high places, thus rejecting God's will that their offerings be made at the Temple in Jerusalem. This was a continuing trend which stretched back to the days of righteous Jehoshaphat, when "the peo-

ple had not yet directed their hearts to the God of their fathers" (2Chronicles 20.33). Perhaps it was due to the people's unfaithfulness that the Lord began sending the nations of Arama and Israel against Judah (see 2Kings 15.37).

## Ahaz's apostasy (2Chronicles 28.1-4; 2Kings 16.1-4)

Jotham's son Ahaz would not continue in the faithful ways of his father. Rather, the text records that "he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel" (2Chronicles 28.2). Significantly, we see in 2Kings 18.2 that his wife was "Abi the daughter of Zechariah." We are not told who this Zechariah was, but it would make sense that this was the king of Israel. Thus, a marriage alliance between the kingdoms yet again resulted in apostasy. Ahaz would not only turn from Jehovah to worship Baal, but would make "his son pass through the fire" in the valley of Ben-hinnom (2Kings 16.3; 2Chronicles 28.3). The valley of Ben-Hinnom was located on the south side of the Temple Mount and would come to symbolize not only apostasy, but the destruction that such apostasy deserves. Thus, Jesus would come to speak of Hell (Gehenna) as the place of eternal fire, darkness and destruction.

As we will note further, Ahaz's apostasy resulted in Judah being afflicted by all the nations surrounding her, and this may have been what prompted the king to sacrifice his own son: "The giving over of one's child in sacrifice was considered an ultimate act in light of a desperate situation, as seen when the Moabite king Mesha sacrificed his son on the city wall during a battle against Israel (2 Kings 3:26–27)... In the Old Testament, the imagery of children passing through the fire is connected with the god Molech, a Canaanite deity often connected with the Ammonites." (ZBBC).



## Judah at the mercy of the nations (2Chronicles 28.5-15; 2Kings 16.5-6)

In rejecting Jehovah in favor of Baal and Molech, Ahaz had rejected his "help" (see Hosea 13.9). Thus Ahaz and Judah found themselves at the mercy of the nations. Chronicles describes invasions from the Edomites and Philistines as a means of the Lord humbling "Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had brought a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the Lord" (2Chronicles 28.17-18). Much greater attention is paid to how Aram and Israel decimated Judah's forces and territory during Ahaz's reign (see 2Chronicles 28.5-15; 2Kings 16.5-6).

Once again, the broader geopolitical situation helps to shed light on the Biblical narrative. "With the withdrawal of Tiglath-pileser in 738, Rezin and Pekah of Israel were able to take steps to create a Syro-Palestinian confederation in preparation for an anticipated second conquest by the Assyrians. Damascus by now had become the power base and natural leader in all of Syria and so was able to recruit states in the north to the cause. Before long Tyre, Sidon, and other Phoenician centers joined in, and even Philistia and Edom complied, perhaps reluctantly. Only Judah was left. Ahaz, whatever his faults, was astute enough to see that total domination of the eastern Mediterranean world by Assyria was only a matter of time. He decided to throw in his lot with the eventual winner rather than with those who shortsightedly believed they could prevail." (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pages 419-420). Since Ahaz would not comply willingly, Aram and Israel worked together to either force Ahaz into submission, or replace him with a king who would (see *Isaiah 7.6*).



## Call to trust Jehovah (*Isaiah 7*)

In the midst of turmoil and destruction came an opportunity for Ahaz and Judah to place their trust in their faithful Lord. *Isaiah 7* records the fearfulness of Ahaz and all of Judah at this time: "his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind" (vs. 2). Yet the Lord had a message of comfort for this wicked king: "Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah" (vs. 4). Furthermore, the Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign that would confirm the Lord's promise, and when the king refused the Lord provided a sign anyway:

### Isaiah 7:14–16 (NASB95)

<sup>14</sup> “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> “He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. <sup>16</sup> “For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

The ultimate fulfillment of this sign was the virgin birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah who would rescue God's people (see Luke 1.30-35), but there was also an immediacy to this sign, a fulfillment which would occur during the days of Ahaz. He was promised that Israel and Aram would cease to trouble him in the time that it would take a virgin (ie. young woman) to conceive, bear and rear a son. It may be that Isaiah's own son was in mind (see Isaiah 8.1-4). The overall point is that Ahaz had an opportunity to place his faith and trust in the Lord; sadly it was an opportunity he failed to grasp.

### **Ahaz's failure to have faith (2Chronicles 28.16-27; 2Kings 16.7-20; Isaiah 8)**

Rather than trust the Lord, “Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria for help” (2Chronicles 28.16). Ahaz took the precious things from the Lord's house and gave them to Tiglath-pileser III (2Kings 16.8), but “it did not help him” (2Chronicles 28.22). In fact, the Scripture records that “Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him” (2Chronicles 28.20). Assyria ultimately would remove the threat of Aram and Israel (2Kings 16.9), but at a great price to Judah. “what had begun as a “gift” from Ahaz for certain pressures that Tiglath-Pileser was to place on Rezin and Pekah turned out to be a requirement for an annual tribute laid on Judah. The Assyrian king simply interpreted the “gift” as the first installment on an annual tribute; thus Ahaz, in his attempt to bypass the divine promise offered by Isaiah the prophet, ran headlong into the arms of Assyrian domination and taxation” (Walter Kaiser, A History of Israel, page 373).

Ahaz still could have turned to the Lord, but tragically he turned further away. He replicated the altar of the Arameans which he'd seen in Damascus, replacing the altar of the Lord with the altar of a pagan god and using the Lord's altar for divination (see 2Kings 16.10-18). He gave his allegiance to the gods of the Arameans and barred entry to the house of the Lord (2Chronicles 28.22-25).

The Lord had another message for Ahaz, but this one was not one of comfort. The king may rejoice over the defeat of Aram and Israel, but destruction was coming to Judah as well!

Isaiah 8:6–8 (NASB95)

<sup>6</sup> “Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; <sup>7</sup> “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, Even the king of Assyria and all his glory; And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. <sup>8</sup> “Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, It will reach even to the neck; And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land,  
O Immanuel.