

2 Kings 16:1-20

Ahaz King of Judah

16 In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. ² Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. ³ He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ⁴ He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

⁵ Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him. ⁶ At that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram by driving out the people of Judah. Edomites then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.

⁷ Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. ⁹ The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

¹⁰ Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction. ¹¹ So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from

Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned. ¹² When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it. ¹³ He offered up his burnt offering and grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and splashed the blood of his fellowship offerings against the altar. ¹⁴ As for the bronze altar that stood before the LORD, he brought it from the front of the temple—from between the new altar and the temple of the LORD—and put it on the north side of the new altar.

¹⁵ King Ahaz then gave these orders to Uriah the priest: “On the large new altar, offer the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering, the king’s burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. Splash against this altar the blood of all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. But I will use the bronze altar for seeking guidance.” ¹⁶ And Uriah the priest did just as King Ahaz had ordered.

¹⁷ King Ahaz cut off the side panels and removed the basins from the movable stands. He removed the Sea from the bronze bulls that supported it and set it on a stone base. ¹⁸ He took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple and removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the LORD, in deference to the king of Assyria.

¹⁹ As for the other events of the reign of Ahaz, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? ²⁰ Ahaz rested with his ancestors and was buried with them in the City of David. And Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king.

Romans 1:18-25

God's Wrath Against Sinful Humanity

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Sermon: These are Dark Days

Please have your **Bibles opened** at **2 Kings 16**

You have an **outline** – if you'd like to take notes. Let me **pray**...

Intro/Context

These are **dark days** that we are living in

(pause)

[Slide 1 – These are dark days]

Today is **International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church**

Let me mention the **three most dangerous countries in the world to be a Christian:**

North Korea – where it is **illegal to be a Christian** and believers in Jesus are either sent to labour camps or killed –and - those who haven't been captured **risk their lives to meet in secret**

Somalia –where Christians **are targets for violent attacks by extremist groups.**

Yemen – where years of food shortages; civil war; and strict Islamic laws, **mean that Christians are impoverished and vulnerable**

These are dark days we live in

(pause)

And that's before we mention the **atrocities going on in the Ukraine** where there have been **over 10,000 deaths and 18,000 injured!**

And then there's the **terrible situation in Israel and Gaza** – where there have **already been 10,000 deaths**

These are dark days we live in

(pause)

This is **nothing new**

In our OT reading from **2 Kings 16**

There are **dark days** there too – as we look at **King Ahaz** of the Southern Kingdom of Judah

The year is around about **730BC**

Why are there **dark days** in Ahaz's time?

Following the wrong way (2 Kings 16:1-4, Romans 1:18-25)

[Slide 2a-Heading/Reason 1]

The first reason why - is in **verses 1 to 4**

And it's because Ahaz is following the wrong way

Look at v2 – Ahaz is not like his forefather King David – **who was a man after God's own heart** (see 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22)

Ahaz ***did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God***

Instead – v3 – Ahaz ***followed the ways of the Kings of [the Northern King of]***

Israel – now remember the Northern Kingdom – was worshipping two golden calves at Bethel and Dan – and also worshipping the false god Baal introduced by the wicked king Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

So, for a King of Judah - to follow the ways of the false worship of Israel **is very telling indeed** and shows how low Ahaz has gone

And if that isn't bad enough – still in v3 – ***Ahaz even sacrificed his son in fire*** – and Ahaz was also ***following the detestable worship practices of the surrounding***

nations – which God had driven out of the Promised Land – so that the Israelites wouldn't follow the other nations' terrible worship practices.

This is an **all-time low for Judah!**

Is God happy with this?

In our NT reading from Romans 1:18-25 – [***which you can turn to now***] – the Apostle Paul says this in v18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Paul is saying – God gets very angry about such godlessness and wickedness – like the wickedness Ahaz is doing!

Paul goes on to say in verses 19-20 – that's it's pretty obvious just by looking around at everything God has created and seeing His power in action in Creation – it's pretty obvious - He is the one true God – and people have no excuse not to believe in Him

But vv21-22 – people couldn't be bothered worshipping God or giving God any glory – instead they resorted to futile and foolish thinking – thinking they were wise when in fact, they were foolish

And so v23 – *they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and mammals and reptiles.*

That's what King Ahaz of Judah did – and - that's what the Kings of the Northern Kingdom did – they swapped from worshipping the one true God to false worship!

So as Paul says in v24 – **God gave them over to their sinful desires**

And the reason they did that Paul says in v25 is – **they exchanged the truth about God for a lie – and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised!**

Application

But **we're** not like that today?

Are **we**?

(pause)

Those **countries we mentioned earlier?**

They are persecuting Christians because those countries **have exchanged the truth about God and His Son Jesus – for a lie!**

They worship and follow false gods and follow a false religion – and **believe the lie** – and **reject the truth about Jesus** – to the point that they want to kill anyone who believes in Jesus!

(pause)

When it comes to **the war and invasion of the Ukraine** – it boils down to someone or some group of people wanting what doesn't belong to them – and so they are prepared to kill to get it. Any invasion of any country boils down to that.

There's a commandment about that – in the Bible – God says - **do not covet**

There's also a commandment about – **not murdering people too!**

But people have exchanged God's truth for a lie – and believe **it's okay to take what's not yours and it's okay to murder people!**

And many people go along with the lie - because - they follow the sinful leader of the country and **don't follow God!**

When it comes to the conflict in Gaza and Israel – it's the same thing – **people have exchanged God's truth for a lie** – they say - **it's okay to take what's not yours – it's okay to murder – it's okay to take revenge and it's okay for innocent people to die – and it's okay to hate!**

But we're not like that – are we?

We wouldn't exchange the truth of God for a lie – would we?

- Our country **legalised same sex marriage in 2017** – despite the Bible saying marriage is between a man and a woman
- Our country recognises - **more than two genders** – despite the Bible saying God made humans – male and female
- We even have people who identify as - **non-binary** – that is - they are neither female or male?
- Our **Schools** are **teaching** our **primary aged children about these different genders**
- It's even okay - in some schools - **to identify as cat!** These people are called furries apparently!
- And apparently as Christians **it's not cool** for us to tell people about Jesus – and it's not cool for us to talk about what God says in the Bible **about sexuality and gender** – that's outlawed as us practicing “conversion therapy”

- But it IS okay to feed our children rubbish like Halloween – and let them wander the streets dressed as devils, demons, ghosts and monsters!

God – and His Son – and God’s Word – are being pushed further and further out of people’s lives!

These are dark days – because people are following the wrong way.

Whereas Proverbs 3:5-8 says:

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding;

⁶ in all your ways submit to him,

and he will make your paths straight.

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;

fear the LORD and shun evil.

⁸ This will bring health to your body

and nourishment to your bones.

Back to King Ahaz

The second reason **there are dark days in Judah** is in **verses 5 to 9**

It’s because Ahaz chose the wrong saviour

[Slide 2-Second Reason]

Choosing the wrong saviour (2 Kings 16:5-9)

Look at v5 – **King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel try to attack Ahaz**

We know from elsewhere in the Bible (Isaiah 7:6) that - the King of Aram and the King of Israel - wanted to get rid of Ahaz and replace him with their own king
If Ahaz was removed and replaced by a foreign king - this would have been the end of the Davidic line – and the end of God’s promise that there would always be a king on David’s throne

But instead of Ahaz trusting in God as his saviour

Ahaz looks for a human saviour – see v7 – King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria

Look what Ahaz says “*I am your servant and vassal. Come and save me out of the hands of the King of Aram and the King of Israel, who are attacking me*”

And Ahaz even pays for his human saviour – with silver and gold from the temple of the Lord in v8 – which is not his silver and gold to give - by the way!

And of course – King Tiglath-Pileser comes to the rescue in v9.

Ahaz should have trusted in God’s promise to King David – and Ahaz should have known that God would not allow this to happen

In fact, we read in Isaiah 7:7 about this incident that God actually says:

“It will not take place; it will not happen”

But Ahaz still chose the wrong saviour – he became Tiglath’s servant – and not the Lord God’s servant!

By choosing the wrong saviour – Ahaz sets himself on a course for further wrong choices as we’ll see in a minute

Application

But we’re not like that today, are we?

We wouldn't ever choose what we think might work – ahead of trusting in God – would we?

Well...

What about the person in a difficult or disappointing marriage – do they chose to communicate their concerns with their spouse and perhaps get some professional help – or – **do they seek comfort in an extra-marital affair with the understanding and caring person at work – and in doing so **they choose the wrong saviour?****

What about the person who chooses to listen to the advice of a close friend - even though the advice contradicts God's Word? In doing so – **they choose the wrong saviour?**

What about the person who rushes into a big purchase – or a huge investment – or a new career – **thinking this will set them up for life – without consulting God – and without praying? In doing so – **they choose the wrong saviour?****

There are many ways we can be disciples of Ahaz

It's basically any situation we find ourselves in – where we say to ourselves – “*My troubles are too complex for me to lean upon God, but I can see a clear and very obvious way to solve this problem with someone else's help***” – rather than saying**

to ourselves “***My Heavenly Father knows what is best and He will give me what is good***” (Matthew 7:11)

Let US not choose the wrong saviour!

(pause)

The third reason **there are dark days in Judah** is in **verses 10 to 18**

It's because Ahaz introduced improper worship!

[Slide 3-Third Reason]

Introducing Improper Worship (2 Kings 16:10-18)

Look at **verses 10 to 16**

During Ahaz's visit to Damascus to see Tiglath-Pileser King of Assyria – Ahaz sees a trendy altar and decides to send its design to the priest Uriah in Jerusalem.

Ahaz instructs Uriah to build a replica of this altar based on the design he saw in Damascus.

When Ahaz returns to Jerusalem, he offers sacrifices on the new altar and commands the priests to use it for all their offerings.

Ahaz then moves the bronze altar of the Lord away from the front of the temple to make way for his new altar, thereby altering the religious practices in Judah.

And if that's not enough changes

In vv17-18 – King Ahaz decides to plunder The Temple furniture of all its bronze.

He **stripped the bronze from The Temple furnishings,** even salvaged the four bronze oxen that supported the huge basin, The Sea, and set The Sea

unceremoniously on the stone pavement. **Finally, he removed any distinctive features from within The Temple that were offensive to the king of Assyria.**

Ahaz is serving the King of Assyria now – not the Lord God!

Why does Ahaz do this?

It's because travel has broadened Ahaz's mind. He has gained some new ideas from his visit to Damascus. **And Ahaz wants to please King Tiglath – rather than pleasing God!**

Ahaz has basically compromised with a pagan king – and then tried to syncretize the worship of the one true God with the worship of false gods!

What is so wrong with introducing this improper worship?

Well first – the King's changes to worship – **imply that there was something wrong with the worship YHWH God had prescribed** – and these changes then led the people into improper worship

And second – **the weakness of Uriah the Priest** – in just going along with the the Kings' idea to build a new altar and deconstruct temple worship – **allowed evil improper worship to flourish!**

But we're not like that – are we?

We wouldn't introduce improper worship – would we?

(pause)

Application

Well – whenever we attempt to “enrich” our worship service – **are we not implying orthodox worship is somehow deficient or lacking?**

If we allow our worship service to be tinkered with and changed - to become - “over commercialised” or we focus too much on “entertaining” – we could end up diluting the message from God’s Word – and we could end up losing the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection

We need to be very careful not to compromise with worldly influences and make our worship improper!

The Gospel of Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection **should be sufficient for us!**

(pause)

And what about Uriah the Priest’s behaviour?

Isn’t he weak?

Shouldn’t Uriah have stood up to King Ahaz – when Ahaz wanted to build a new altar and move the Lord’s altar and deconstruct the worship of God?

Can we be a bit like Uriah sometimes – we choose to **comply** - **rather than confront?**

Uriah had a lot to lose if he questioned King Ahaz’s behaviour!

And it’s the same for us – **when we stand up for God and defend what is right and true?**

We could lose a lot too? Maybe lose a friend or family member? Maybe lose our job? Maybe disliked or rejected?

But - if we don't stand up for what is right – then we allow what is wrong to continue – by default!

And we know that “*evil happens when good people do nothing!*”

For example –if we know our politicians are implementing policies contrary to God's Word – are we telling them so?

And if we are praying for our politicians as they debate in Parliament – which is the best thing to pray: ‘*that their meetings and discussions are conducted in a peaceful manner*’ - OR – to pray that ‘*in their meetings and discussions, they do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, and if they don't, that someone is brave and bold enough to challenge them*’

Evil is helped by weakness and compromise - just as much as - by wickedness
(pause)

The Hope of a Better King (2 Kings 16:19-20 and John 8:12)

So, we've seen that we are living in dark days

We've seen there were dark days in Judah

Because –Ahaz and the people followed the wrong way

Because –Ahaz chose the wrong Saviour

And because – Ahaz and Uriah introduced improper worship

There's not much hope in this chapter?

[Slide 3a-Hope]

Or maybe there is a sniff of hope in verse 20

When Ahaz rests with his ancestors and is buried - Ahaz's son Hezekiah **succeeds him!**

Hezekiah ensures that the Davidic promise from God **that there will be a descendant of David on the throne continues!**

And if we read 2 Kings 18-19 [[maybe this afternoon](#)] **we will see that Hezekiah is a really good King**

Here's how 2 Kings 18:5-6 describes Hezekiah

⁵ Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. ⁶ He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses

Now **that's better**, isn't it?

(pause)

But we still need an answer to these dark days we live in today?

And the answer comes from one of Hezekiah's descendants [[Hezekiah is mentioned in the Jesus' genealogy – Matthew 1:10](#)]

The answer is **King Jesus**

[Slide 3b-John 8:12]

Jesus said this about Himself:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

There's the answer to the persecutors in **North Korea, Somalia and Yemen,**

There's the answer to **the war in the Ukraine**

There's the answer to **the war in Gaza/Israel**

We all need to come to Jesus and follow Him – and we will no longer be in the dark – but in His wonderful light

Let's pray...

Father God, help us to follow your way not our own way

Help us to choose Jesus as our only Saviour

Help us to maintain proper worship of you

Help us to be brave enough to stand up to your truth and not believe the lies of this world.

Thank you that, Jesus, the Light of the World, is the answer to the dark days we live in.

In His name, we pray, Amen!