

2 Chronicles 28: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 0 0] 2 Chronicles chapter 28 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.
- He even made metal images for the Baals, and he made offerings in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations, whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.
- And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him, and took captive a great number of his people, and brought them to Damascus.
- He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force. For Pekah the son of Ramaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.
- And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseah, the king's son, and Azrakam, the commander of the palace, and Elkanah, the next in authority to the king. The men of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters.
- [1 : 1 5] They also took much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, Behold, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven.
- And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the Lord your God? Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.
- Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Mishillamoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shalom, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, and said to them, You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt.
- For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly, and the men who had been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them.
- They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees.

[2 : 42] Then they returned to Samaria. At that time King Ahaz sent the king of Assyria for help, for the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah and carried away captives, and the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negev of Judah, and had taken Beth Shemesh, Ejelon, Gedaroth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages, and they settled there.

For the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully, and had been very unfaithful to the Lord. So Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, came up against him, and afflicted him instead of strengthening him.

For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the Lord, and the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, but it did not help him. In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord, this same king Ahaz, for he sacrificed the gods of Damascus that had defeated him, and said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.

But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. And Ahaz 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, and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger the Lord, the God of his fathers. Now the rest of his acts, and all his ways, from first to last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

[4 : 20] And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem. For they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

2 Chronicles chapter 28 records the reign of Ahaz and Judah, following after his predecessors Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham, all faithful kings to some extent.

Ahaz completely breaks this trend. He is a wicked and unfaithful king. His sins exceed even those of some of the worst of the Israelite kings. He performs abominations associated with the previous peoples of the land, the Canaanites.

He burns his sons as an offering, besides sacrificing an offering on all the high places and hills and under every green tree. As a consequence of his great sin, the Lord gives him into the hand of his enemies.

He is attacked on every single side. He is attacked by the king of Syria, who defeats him and takes captive a great number of his people. He suffers a devastating loss at the hand of the king of Israel.

[5 : 20] He is also attacked by the Edomites and the Philistines. And when he turns to Assyria for help, Assyria ends up afflicting him rather than strengthening him. On every single side, Judah is being broken down.

They are attacked on their west by the Philistines, to the east by Aram, the Syrians. At their south, they are attacked by the Edomites. And at the north, they are attacked by their brothers Israel.

Ahaz's loss in battle to peek at the son of Remaliah is of totally epic proportions. One hundred and twenty thousand people killed, all of them fighting men.

This might well be about half the army wiped out in a single day. And besides losing a great number of his army, he also loses Maaseah, his son, and two key figures of the nobility, Azrakam and Elkanah.

As if this weren't enough, two hundred thousand of their relatives are taken captive and brought to Samaria with much spoil. It is hard to imagine a more utter defeat than this.

[6 : 17] However, 2 Chronicles chapter 28 has a twist in the tale. In the centre of the chapter, a surprising event occurs. In the context of apostate nations in the north and in the south, in Israel and Judah, God speaks to his people.

He speaks by a prophet named Oded, an Israelite prophet that declares that Judah has been given into the hand of Israel on account of its great sin, but that Israel in its bloodthirstiness puts itself in great jeopardy.

Its sins are no less great, and the Lord's judgment will come upon it too. If Israel does not turn back from the action that it is taking with Judah, then it will be in danger of inviting even more speedy judgment upon itself.

Most surprisingly, the men of Samaria respond. The armed men respond faithfully too, as the chiefs of Ephraim had listened to the prophet Oded, so they listened to the chiefs of Ephraim.

They leave the captives with them. In an action that is truly astonishing in the context, they act with mercy towards these captives. They take the captives and clothe all the naked among them.

[7 : 23] They give them sandals. They provide them with food and drink. They anoint them. They carry all the feeble on donkeys. And they escort them back to their own people at Jericho. As these two brother nations hurtle towards the abyss of exile together, for just a brief moment they are reminded that they are brother peoples, that they both belong to the Lord their God who has brought them in, and who is angry on account of their unfaithfulness.

From this brief recognition of brotherhood under God, this great act of mercy can take place. God is here also showing a reprieve to Ahaz and the southern kingdom. Despite their great wickedness, he does not utterly destroy them.

He spares them the full force of the fate that they deserve. Ahaz is the one who brings misery upon the people. Through his unfaithfulness, he brings enemies upon them from all sides. And Ahaz's response to his distress, even when the Lord has shown him such great mercy in it, is to become even more faithless.

He turns to the gods of the oppressor nations, and abandons the worship of the Lord. He shuts up the doors of the house of the Lord, he makes himself altars in all parts of Jerusalem, and he gathers together the vessels of the house of the Lord and cuts them in pieces.

The king, whose responsibility it was to establish true worship, actually establishes high places and their worship to other gods in every single part of Judah. Later on in the story of scripture, we find a surprising callback to this chapter.

[8 : 48] There is a story that has many of the same details. The attentive reader of the parable of the Good Samaritan might be struck by some specific geographical references. Jerusalem, Jericho and Samaria.

These geographical references might not be significant by themselves. But when we notice that many further details of the story of 2 Chronicles 28 are repeated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we might start to pay some attention.

The captives of Judah and Jerusalem are like men who have fallen among thieves. Judah has suffered a great loss of life, and many of those remaining will be weak and badly wounded. The half-dead man from Jerusalem in Jesus' parable corresponds to the men of Judah, crushed and plundered on account of their sin.

Oded the prophet came before the army returning to Samaria and informed them of the jeopardy in which they were placing themselves on account of their sin. The Judahites were their brethren, members of the same covenant people.

This serves to expose the true significance of the question of the neighbour in Jesus' parable. The question, who is my neighbour, is inextricably connected with the question of the membership of the people of God.

[9 : 55] In his treatment of the parable, N.T. Wright reminds us of the question that is hovering in the background. Who are the people who will inherit the kingdom? The question of the neighbour is the same question from a different perspective.

Who are my fellow heirs? In identifying the Judahite captives as the brethren of the men of Israel, Oded was making clear that they were the nearest of neighbours within the bond of the covenant.

The way that the men of Samaria treated their covenant neighbours, the Judahites, the people to whom they had the most immediate and most pronounced of duties, was a matter that could provoke the anger of the Lord and that could lead to covenant judgment upon them.

Those who refuse to recognise their brethren will find themselves removed from the family. In the actions that followed the prophetic rebuke of Oded, the men of Samaria express their kinship with the Judahites.

The Samaritan in Jesus' parable does the same. He places the man upon his own animal and pays for him out of his own pocket. In the despised Samaritan and the half-dead Judahite, we see the two halves of the divided kingdom in 2 Chronicles chapter 28.

[10 : 59] As in 2 Chronicles chapter 28, through the neighbourly act of the Samaritan, or Samaritans, these two parties are being restored in the familial bond of the covenant. For the briefest window of time, there is a vision of how things could be otherwise.

A question to consider. How could the act of mercy inspired by the words of the prophet Oded have served as a lesson to Israel and Judah about a different way that they could take?

