



Jotham and Ahaz: You Reap What You Sow

Lesson 17

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting...

Galatians 6:7-8

Last week we talked about the downfall of Israel. We saw what the last few decades of the northern kingdom looked like, with revolutions and assassinations and ultimately disastrous foreign policy. But what was going on in Judah during this time? This week and next week we will be looking at three kings who reigned during the fall of Israel: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

These kings are a mixed bag. Jotham is a good king. Ahaz is a very wicked king. Hezekiah is a good king. Through these three kings we watch the story of God dealing with his faithful and faithless leaders as Judah walks through an incredibly challenging time. In this lesson we will focus on the contrast between the first of these two: Jotham and Ahaz.

These two kings are starkly different in the choices that they made and in the results that they saw. Jotham chose to follow the Lord, and the Lord blessed his reign. Ahaz chose to rebel against God, and watched his kingdom start to crumble around him. As we study these two kings we are reminded of the truth we see elsewhere in Scripture that actions have consequences, and that what you sow is what you will reap.

Jotham (2 Chronicles 27)

I. Jotham was a godly king (2 Chronicles 27:1-2)

Jotham was the son and the grandson of kings that God had called good, although both became arrogant and saw disaster as a result. Jotham is fairly consistent, however. In his rule we see him do what is right throughout, and we see God's blessing as a result.

A. He refused to enter the temple like his father had.

Jotham was able to mimic the best parts of his father's reign while avoiding the pitfall he saw at the end. The author is careful to note specifically that he did not do what his father had done. No doubt watching his father die in a leper house made a big impact on the

young Jotham, and demanding the right to participate in the worship of the Lord was not something he felt compelled to do.

Jotham had the benefit of learning from the example of his father, both positively and negatively. Why is it that many people fail to learn from those who go before them?

B. He did allow pagan worship outside the temple.

The only negative comment we find about Jotham was that, while he personally did what was right, he didn't clamp down on the corruption of the people. It's sad to see, but Jotham apparently didn't have the courage to aggressively go after those who were unfaithful to the Lord. This complacency would prove disastrous as his son would be led away, likely by some of these very same people.

Why do you think Jotham struggled to reign in the corruption of the people? What had things been like in Judah up until this point?

II. Jotham saw God's blessing (2 Chronicles 27:3-6)

Chronicles tells us that Jotham did what was right, and then briefly lists off his accomplishments. While there isn't much time devoted to Jotham, what he was able to accomplish in a medium-length reign was impressive.

A. Jotham succeeded economically (3-4).

Jotham saw a successful building program, working on the Temple, city walls, and building up cities and forts. While only briefly described, this suggests a productive and prosperous sixteen years under Jotham.

B. Jotham succeeded militarily (5).

Jotham was also able to have success on the battlefield. He defeated the Ammonites and was able to exact large sums of money and produce from them as a result.

C. God's blessing was due to Jotham's obedience (6).

This is one of those areas in theology where we have to tread carefully. All of us can picture the grinning TV evangelist promising tons of money, success in relationship, and positions of power and prestige if you just follow God (normally by giving them money). We rightly shrink back from that and respond with the call of discipleship we find on the lips of Jesus – a call to come and die.

We recognize the danger of falling into the thinking of Job's friends (if I do good things for God, he is obligated to do good things for me). Yet we have to do something with this verse that connects Jotham's obedience with his blessing.

How do we as believers think about a verse like this (27:6)?

We also need to remember that Israel is not the church and the church is not Israel. Israel was promised certain very physical blessings if they followed God, blessings that believers look forward to seeing when Christ's kingdom comes. Yet, we do find here a general principle that is true throughout all of Scripture: obedience brings blessing.

III. Jotham saw the beginning of conflict (2 Kings 15:37)

During the end of his reign, Jotham began to see Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel start to attack him. He wouldn't be the king to have to deal with the kings, however. That would fall to his son: Ahaz.

Ahaz (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28)

I. Ahaz acted wickedly (2 Kings 16:1-4; 10-18; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 22-25).

Ahaz followed his godly father and grandfather by failing to live for the Lord. Whereas Israel had been ruled by in large by good kings for the past few generations, a wicked king comes to the throne at one of the scariest moments in the history of Judah!

A. He worshipped idols (2 Chronicles 28:2-4).

Sadly, after all that had happened with Athaliah, Joash, and Jehoida, Ahaz decided that he was going to go back to making and serving images of Baal.

B. He sacrificed his son (2 Chronicles 28:3).

We are told that Ahaz burnt his children as a sacrifice to pagan gods. This level of depravity is hard to fathom happening in Judah. We don't even read about this particular type of wickedness happening in the north. Ahaz sets a new example here; one that will be taken up and followed later by Manasseh, the most wicked king of the south.

C. He built high places (2 Chronicles 28:25).

Whereas previous generations tore down the high places, Ahaz goes around building them up.

D. He altered the worship of the Lord (2 Kings 16:10-15).

Ahaz went down and saw the altar that the Assyrian king had and decided it looked cool enough that he wanted to update the temple accordingly. We read in a following account the slightly bizarre behavior of Ahaz as he sought to “update” the Temple to what he thought made the most sense.

Why did God strike Uzziah with leprosy when he tried to offer incense but leave Ahaz alone when he starts moving the furniture around?

How could someone from a godly lineage have fallen so far so fast?

II. Ahaz sought the help of Assyria rather than God (2 Kings 16:5-9; 2 Chronicles 28:16-21; Isaiah 7:1-6).

Because of Ahaz’s sin, God brought trials to try and get him to return to the Lord. Sadly, this was not to be the case. Rather than turn to God Ahaz simply hardened in his sinful ways.

A. Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, attacked Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:5-15; 2 Kings 16:5-6).

Ahaz faced one of the greatest problems that a southern king had faced until that point. Apparently, this war came in waves. After an initial crushing defeat (2 Chronicles 28:5-15), the country was hit by wars against Edom (2 Chronicles 28:17) and wars against Philistia (2 Chronicles 28:18). Now the kings of Israel and Syria were coming against him again, and their plan was to replace him with a puppet king (cf Isaiah 7:1-6).

B. God challenged Ahaz to trust Him (cf Isaiah 7:8-17).

We come now to background for one of everyone’s favorite Christmas prophecies: the virgin birth. God sends Isaiah the prophet to Ahaz and tells him that he should not seek Assyria’s help but that he should trust God with the problem of Israel and Syria. Ahaz politely responds in unbelief by pretending to not want to “put God to the test.” This, however, doesn’t mean he is ready to trust God, it means that he isn’t willing to give God a chance. Isaiah sees through this pseudo-holy façade and tells Ahaz that God himself will give a sign – a virgin will conceive and give birth.¹

¹ The question over who Isaiah was talking about has caused a lot of discussion over the years. Matthew applies this, of course, to Mary and Christ’s virgin birth. Liberals claim that Isaiah was actually talking about his own son, born in the next chapter, about whom something very similar is stated (Isaiah 7:14-16 compare to 8:3-4). Part of this question depends on the word “virgin.” The Hebrew term is *’almah*. Although this word is different from the more technical term for virgin (*betulah*), it is never used of a married woman and may still indicate someone who is a virgin. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the more technical term for virgin here (*parthenos*). Two contextual considerations are worth noting. (1) It would be odd for Isaiah to offer a sign as high as heaven and then

Why was Ahaz's refusal to ask for a sign a sin?

C. Ahaz sought Assyria's help (2 Chronicles 28:16-21; 2 Kings 16:7-9).

Rather than trust the Lord, Ahaz goes to Tiglath-pileser III and begs him to come save him. So how did that turn out for him? That's an interesting question. We seem to have two conflicting reports here. Chronicles seems to indicate that Ahaz's plan backfired on him (2 Kings 16:7-9; 2 Chronicles 28:20), whereas Kings seems to state that it worked.

Did Assyria help or not?

The answer is, yes and no. Yes, Assyria took care of the immediate problem of Israel and Syria. But they exacted a heavy price in doing so (2 Chronicles 28:21). Ultimately, Ahaz's son would one day be looking at an Assyrian army outside the city demanding its surrender. Ahaz thought he could game the system and win. His plan, while initially successful, proved to be disastrous for the country in the end.

III. Ahaz became more wicked as his life fell apart (2 Chronicles 28:19-21, 2 Kings 16:10-18).

God brought the problems that he did in an attempt to wake the sinful king up. Unfortunately, Ahaz simply doubled down on his sin and rebelled yet more and more.

A. Ahaz's plans failed him (2 Chronicles 28:19-21).

As was mentioned above, rather than be a help, ultimately the turn to Assyria weakened the nation. The king of Assyria wanted a lot of money for his help, and Ahaz had to scramble to pull it together.

Why do we continue to trust in our plans, even when doing so repeatedly fails to work for us or when we know better?

give the underwhelming sign that a woman is going to give birth. This would incline us to think this is talking about a virgin birth. (2) It would also be odd for Isaiah to give a prophecy that God's victory would come before a special child is born... 700+ years in the future. So which is it? While conservative Christians debate this passage, it is perhaps best to see this as a "both/and." Does Isaiah's son fulfill this prophecy? In a lesser sense, yes. Before he is old enough to eat and decide right from wrong, Pekah and Rezin are no longer a threat. Is this talking about Jesus? Of course, Matthew makes that clear. It's possible that the ambiguity of this term is intentional, and that there is a nearer fulfillment and a more distant fulfillment.

B. Ahaz pursued the gods of his enemies hoping they would save him (2 Chronicles 28:22-23).

Even after God had saved Judah by sending a prophet to confront Israel and make them return all the captives of war, Ahaz chose to worship pagan gods in the hopes of succeeding as they did.

Why do we look outside of God for help, even when we find God to be true for us whenever we need him?

Ahaz and Jotham both made choices. Jotham made the choice to follow God. Ahaz made the choice to trust in his own schemes and in the gods of the nations. Jotham saw blessing and military success. Ahaz found himself losing time and again.

It can be easy to fault Ahaz. Why would he not follow the Lord since he saw God protect and prosper his father? Why would he not turn from his evil when it became clear that it wasn't working? Why continue to do that which brings destruction? Yet Ahaz didn't, and too often neither do we. Far too often we too continue down sinful paths, trusting our own ways and looking to the world for answers on how to live best. It can be easy to roll our eyes at Ahaz, until we begin to realize that we are looking in a mirror. Like Ahaz, we too need to be reminded that actions have consequences, that what you sow is what you reap, and that obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings sorrow.

Next week: We will be looking at Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, as he tries to work his way out of the mess his father left him in. We find here a king who was ready to do what was right and was blessed, until he meets some impressive dignitaries from some far off country called "Babylon"...