

***THE STRIPPING OF THE BULLS:***

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE REIGN OF KING AHAZ OF JUDAH**

by

**RALEIGH CHRISTOPHER HETH**

(Under the Direction of Richard E. Friedman)

**ABSTRACT**

This study, through careful exegetical examination of the Deuteronomistic History and the various regnal formulae present in 1/2 Kings, explores the possibility that Ahaz, one of the most negatively evaluated monarchs in the Bible, was possibly originally evaluated in a positive light and that only after secondary editorializations was he said to be an evil, idolatrous ruler. This is accomplished through in-depth analysis of seemingly set patterns in the regnal evaluations and becomes apparent when that of Ahaz is viewed beside the evaluations of other “bad” kings. Operating under this premise, this study will then present an examination of Isaiah 7 and 2 Chronicles 28, as they are, in addition to 2 Kings 16, the remaining biblical texts which detail the reign of Ahaz of Judah. It will be argued that the previous efforts to detail the reign of Ahaz are stuck in a cycle of relying on this editorialization in 2 Kings 16 and that the altered regnal evaluation must be taken into account when attempting to analyze the reign of the king across the biblical corpus.

**Index Words:** Hebrew Bible, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Josiah, Deuteronomistic History, Deuteronomist, Historiography, Child Sacrifice, Kings, Isaiah, Chronicles

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## **DEDICATION**

*For Laura*

כולך יפה רעיתי ומום אין בך

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## INTRODUCTION

Within Biblical Scholarship, it is not uncommon for a single textual interpretation to become the normative understanding within the discipline, regardless of the merits of the idea. Though it can, at times, be easier to stand on the shoulders of the giants of the field who came before and take their explanations at face value while texts deserving of deep focus and research fall by the wayside into predetermined archetypal categories, it is necessary to fight such inaction and advocate for in-depth reexamination. Such an effort is necessary in the case of King Ahaz of Judah. This ruler who, in the mind of most scholars, follows only Ahab and Manasseh in terms of the near universal derision they face in the biblical corpus, is deserving of a thorough reappraisal; There is more to the various accounts of Ahaz than what might be gleaned from a cursory reading and, in so doing, it becomes clear that simply placing him within the category of “evil kings” is a much more difficult task than one might originally believe. This assumption, that Ahaz can be easily categorized in a negative way is due, in part, to his negative regnal evaluation in 2 Kings 16.

Though the majority of his reign appears to be framed in an equivocal fashion, the remainder of his actions within the text are often colored by the initial assessment. This definitionally circular logic (Ahaz built the altar in the temple courtyard because he was evil, Ahaz was evil because he built the altar in the temple courtyard), must be identified as such and abandoned. A comprehensive study will therefore be conducted exploring

each of the three extended narratives in which Ahaz appears.<sup>1</sup> It will be argued that, as it sits, the Deuteronomistic account of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 (specifically the regnal evaluation) is the result of a later editorialization made in an effort to color the king in a negative fashion. The implications of such a claim are far reaching and would shed light on major trends revolving around Ahaz within scholarship. First, this editorialization would explain why the account of Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimite War in Isaiah 7 appears to be much less negative than the way in which it is read. Though the meeting between the prophet and the king is widely regarded as adversarial in nature, a closer reading of the text shows that this is not necessarily the case. It is rather the presuppositions of the reader which force such a reading. Second, this alleged editorialization would explain why the account of Ahaz's reign in 2 Chronicles 28 is so dramatically different than 2 Kings 16. The Chronicler, encountering a negative regnal evaluation within his source material, approached the composition of his narrative with the expressed intent of taking any possibly ambivalent account and reframing it so as to indict Ahaz.

An examination of the role of Ahaz within Deuteronomistic historiography, particularly the issue of his regnal evaluation, is the first step in understanding both the related biblical accounts which follow and the larger impact that the interpretations of these texts have on the normative interpretation of the king within scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 16, Isaiah 7, 2 Chronicles 28.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ROLE OF AHAZ IN DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

The redactional history of the Deuteronomistic History, specifically that of the differing regnal accounts in Kings, is no small point of contention within the field. Martin Noth, in his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, posited that a single exilic editor compiled the entirety of the Deuteronomistic History.<sup>2</sup> Later, Frank Moore Cross and fellow members of his school championed the idea of an initial Josianic composition (Dtr<sup>1</sup>) that was later redacted through the efforts of an Exilic Deuteronomist (Dtr<sup>2</sup>) with the intent of explaining the fall of Judah within the established original text.<sup>3</sup> While there are many scholars who still hold to Noth's original idea of a largely exilic or post-exilic compilation of the Deuteronomistic History,<sup>4</sup> others have begun searching for the sources which this historian, whenever he lived and compiled his work, used in his endeavor. Among these proposed sources is that of a Hezekian edition of the book of Kings which contained a narrative of the kings of Israel and Judah running from Solomon to

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, trans. Jane Doull (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 4-11.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 219-289. Also, R.E. Friedman, *The Exile and Biblical Narrative* (Chico, CA: Scholars University Press, 1981), 1-25. R.E. Friedman, "From Egypt to Egypt: Dtr<sup>1</sup> and Dtr<sup>2</sup>" in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and John D. Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981) 167-192. R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981). Gary N Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies, I, The Reign of Solomon and the Rise of Jeroboam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). Gary N. Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies, II, the Fall of Israel and the Reign of Josiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> And those who would date it even later, see Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 316 [footnote 84]. Brian Peckham, *The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

Hezekiah.<sup>5</sup> The evidence provided by the likes of Halpern and Vanderhooft make this hypothesis not only plausible, but likely.<sup>6</sup> Adhering to this triple redaction framework, it will be argued that the negative evaluation of Ahaz in Kings as it stands in the received text is an addition or modification made by the Josianic historian to his Hezekian source material.

At first glance, the only thing one might find noteworthy about the Ahaz account is the fact that he receives a negative evaluation, a less common assessment for Judean kings. Up to Ahaz, the only Davidides to whom the historian assigns a negative evaluation are Rehoboam, who is held responsible in part for the schism of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, and Jehoram and Ahaziah, who were both related to the Omride dynasty.<sup>7</sup> The negative wording attributed to Ahaz in an otherwise positive stint of rulers causes it to stand out more so than others. The four kings preceding Ahaz (Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham) comprise the longest stretch of positive evaluations for Judean kings. Additionally, the king who follows him (Hezekiah) receives a positive evaluation. The regnal evaluation of Ahaz is so decidedly negative that one is hard pressed among the Judean kings to find a comparable one outside of Manasseh, a ruler

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<sup>5</sup> For literature reviews discussing the history of scholarship on the subject, see: Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History* (London: T and T Clark, 2005), 13-44. Iain Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 4-55. Gary Knoppers, "Theories on the Redaction(s) of Kings," in *The Book of Kings*, ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 69-88. Helga Weippert, "Das Deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk: sien Ziel Ende in der neueren Forschung," *Theologische Rundschau* NF 50 (1985) 213-249.

<sup>6</sup> Baruch Halpern and David S. Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings in the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.E." in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, v. 62 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1991), 209-213. Helga Weippert, "Die deuteronomistischen Beurteilungen der Knige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher," *Biblica* 53 (1972) 301-339. A.F. Cambell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Sameul-2 Kings 10)* (Washington: Catholic Bible Association, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> No Israelite kings receive a positive evaluation. This includes Jehu, who it claims failed to turn from the high places of Rehoboam like those who came before him. Israelite rulers appear to be the standard of evil present in the overarching narrative of Kings. Israelite kings are referenced, among other criteria, to whether or not they destroyed the golden calves established by the king Jeroboam. Others are compared to "Ahab and the Kings of Israel."

who was so terrible in our historian's eyes that he is blamed for the Babylonian exile. The enumeration of Ahaz's supposed sins begin first and most plainly in that he is given an explicitly negative assessment: *wl' šh hyšr b'yny yhwh*.<sup>8</sup> Second, his actions are directly related to the sins of the kings of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Third, he is said to "pass his son through the fire," an action likened to the peoples living in the land before the Israelites rather than the Israelites or their kings.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the regnal evaluation only comprises a small portion of the larger Ahaz narrative; the actual account of Ahaz's reign contains nothing that forces the reader to the conclusion that Ahaz was a bad or unfaithful ruler. If the description of his reign is read independently of the regnal evaluation, a very different view might be gleaned from the text in terms of Ahaz's narrative.<sup>11</sup> The reader is presented with a king who saves his kingdom from destruction at the hand of a large coalition of forces, a king who installs a great altar in the courtyard of the temple, a king who removed animal imagery from that same courtyard, and a king who removed his own personal entryway to the temple.<sup>12</sup> Asa, who appeals to the king of Aram in a nearly identical fashion to Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III, receives no such condemnation. Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham, who, in the same vein as Ahaz, failed to destroy the high places, are given positive evaluations. While he is given a negative evaluation, his actions, when viewed

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Kgs 16:3. This might seem to be a standard negative evaluation, but, as will be shown below, it is quite strange indeed.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Kgs 16:3

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kgs 16:3. Issues arise here, as II Kings 17:17 blames the Israelite people, claiming that they were also responsible for "passing their sons and daughters through the fire." However, these actions are also contributed to the people who lived in the land before.

<sup>11</sup> This is true for the book of Isaiah as well, as will be discussed below.

<sup>12</sup> While the removal of both the bronze bulls and the royal entryway are framed in light of deference to the king of Assyria, an alternative viewpoint will be presented below. An extensive search of the royal court documents of Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon has not turned up a single reference to the forced removal either animal imagery or royal entryways can be found among them.

independently and in the light of other Judean kings, do not seem to warrant such round derision. In order to reconcile these competing ideas, the varying pieces of the negative evaluation must be examined and analyzed in relation to larger trends in regnal evaluations. Such a procedure suggests that the evaluation of Ahaz sits awkwardly not because the original historian is drawing a conclusion that his source material doesn't support, but because the negative evaluation is a product of editorial intervention on the part of the Josianic historian responsible for the compilation of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole and that this evaluation is, in fact, at odds with the Hezekian composition underlying his work.

### **Rhetoric**

Regnal formulae are often used as standards for the identification of redactional layers in Kings.<sup>13</sup> Different types of formulae, such as the Death and Burial Formula and the naming of the Queen Mother, have been extensively catalogued and evaluated by Halpern and Vanderhooft.<sup>14</sup> These formulae, thematic vestiges with Chronicles, and the statement that Hezekiah was "the greatest king who ever lived" were subsequently used to argue for an initial Hezekian edition of the book of Kings that was later included in and revised by the Josianic Deuteronomist.<sup>15</sup> In this discussion, they propose that the original account of Solomon would have been wholly positive while the Josianic redactor

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<sup>13</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 315-321, (too) quickly dismisses regnal formulae, thus supporting his position of a single redactor.

<sup>14</sup> Halpern and Vanderhooft, "Editions of Kings," 183-199. See also Provan, *Hezekiah*, 134-143.

<sup>15</sup> Baruch Halpern, *Sacred History and Ideology: Chronicles' Thematic Structure – Indications of an Earlier Source.* In *The Creation of Sacred Literature*, ed. R.E. Friedman, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: California University Press, 1981), 35-54. Halpern and Vanderhooft, *Editions of Kings*, 179-183. Provan, *Hezekiah*. George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 286-288.

would have been responsible for the negative evaluation at the end of his reign.<sup>16</sup> While not a majority view, the case of the evaluation of Ahaz actually strengthens this argument in that similar historiographic reasoning can be posited for the negative evaluation of this ruler as well. In other words, it seems that Ahaz was presented in a positive light in the Hezekian history, and was only later devalued by the Josianic historian.

The first point of discussion should be the beginning of the negative evaluation in which the historian directly tells the reader that Ahaz is wicked, or, in his parlance, "did not do the upright in the eyes of YHWH."<sup>17</sup> Because every king receives an evaluation of some sort and nearly all Judean and Israelite kings are said to be guilty of not reaching the ideal standard, this statement seems, at a glance, straightforward. However, this phrase stands out when compared to the specific, stereotyped phrases that are used by the Deuteronomistic historian to denote a king's behavior, whether positive or negative.<sup>18</sup> When a king is viewed positively in the history, he is said to have "done what was upright in the eyes of YHWH" or some small variation of such. As can be seen, the historian consistently uses the same formula when describing kings he thinks merit a positive evaluation. The word *hyšr*, translated as "that which is good" or "that which is upright" is a consistent feature found in the positive evaluations of kings. This is true even for those who did not depart from the high places established by Rehoboam and is often qualified by their failure to do so. Alternatively, similar formulaic phrasing can be

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<sup>16</sup> Halpern, "Sacred History," 35-54. Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Critique of Solomon in the Josianic Edition of the Deuteronomistic History," *Society of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 607-622. Gary N. Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 63 (2001), 393-415, shows that, in comparison to other ANE rulers, Solomon's account of wealth falls readily in line and, more than likely, would not have originally been considered negative in any way.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Kgs 16:2.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix A.



found in reference to the kings who receive negative evaluations: *wy 'š hr ' b 'yny yhwh*.<sup>19</sup>

Like the consistent usage of the word *hyšr* in positive evaluations, the far more frequent negative evaluations consistently use the word *hr '* to denote the actions of the king.

The regularity of this formula brings Ahaz's evaluation into contrast, as it deviates from this otherwise regular and consistent usage. In fact, it is the only exception that can be found among the kings of Israel and Judah. What can be seen here is an inversion in the previously used rhetoric. Instead of deploying the typical negative formula, "he did evil in the eyes of YHWH," the historian instead uses a negation of the positive formula: "he *did not* do what was upright in the eyes of YHWH." This is no insignificant stylistic variation; because he is the only king for whom this formula is used, it seems likely that there is something more at play here.<sup>20</sup> Before chalking this up to simple variation, we should first explore the possibility that there is some historiographic reason that motivated the historian to apply this evaluation to this, and only this, king. More to the point, since there is already an example of the Josianic historian taking a positive portrayal of a king from his Hezekian source and transforming it into a negative one, one could argue, if proper historiographic reasoning can be deduced, that a similar process was followed here.

The negative account of Solomon is widely attributed by those who subscribe to the dual redaction theory to be a product of Cross's Dtr<sup>1</sup>, the rough equivalent of Halpern's Josianic historian. Halpern has gone so far to suggest that the Hezekian edition

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>20</sup> I am by no means the first to note this variation in the accounts, see: Provan, *Hezekiah*, 52; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings*, Anchor Bible 11 (New York: Double Day, 1988, 190. That said, very little attention has been paid to its possible meaning. More often than not, the irregularity is ignored outright.

of the book of Kings included a positive presentation of the reign of Solomon and that, as in Chronicles, Hezekiah is pictured as Solomon redux. The disconnect between the negative material and subsequent evaluation of Solomon in the final chapters of his reign on the one hand and the very positive portrayal of Solomon in most of the account on the other can be explained by the Josianic historian using this Hezekian edition as source material. Respect for his sources and for the cultural memories surrounding Solomon prevent the historian from presenting Solomon as negative throughout the account. Instead, he contents himself with either adding or including an account of Solomon building high places for foreign deities because of which the historian labels him as having “done the bad in the eyes of YHWH.”<sup>21</sup> That the Josianic historian had a partisan and ideological interest in presenting Solomon in such a light is supported by his presentation of Josiah’s reign.<sup>22</sup> Josiah, more than David or Hezekiah, is the embodiment of the monarchic ideal established in Deuteronomy 18 while Solomon conflicts with it heavily.<sup>23</sup> Josiah, whose reform actions at Beth-El<sup>24</sup> suggest an attempt to reunite the empire stands in opposition to Solomon, the reason for the division of the two kingdoms.<sup>25</sup> The altars to foreign gods, which Solomon is supposed to have built, are destroyed by Josiah.<sup>26</sup> Based on his use of the standards for kingship in Deuteronomy 18, his blaming of the schism on Solomon,<sup>27</sup> and his positioning of Josiah as an anti-Solomon, it is reasonable to trace the condemnation of Solomon to the Josianic historian

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Kgs 11:1-10.

<sup>22</sup> Sweeney, *Solomon*, 609-611.

<sup>23</sup> Knoppers, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History*. Additionally, the concept of Josiah as “the most Deuteronomistic king, is covered extensively by Sweeney, *Solomon*, 607-620.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Kgs 23:15-18.

<sup>25</sup> Sweeney, *Solomon*, 614-615.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Kgs 23:13.

<sup>27</sup> Halpern, “Sacred History and Ideology,” 35-54.

and the tension between this condemnation and the larger presentation of Solomon to the fact that he is modifying already existing sources.

A similar historiographic motivation can be posited for the condemnation of Ahaz. As pointed out above, the actual account of Ahaz's reign includes no clearly negative elements, especially when compared with other condemned kings who precede him. Furthermore, the account of Hezekiah's reign reinforces the impression that Ahaz was not viewed negatively in the Hezekian history. Hezekiah, whose reform is framed in such a way as to make it appear to be solely religious in nature,<sup>28</sup> is not mentioned as having reacted to the specifically stated crimes of Ahaz in any way. For instance, Hezekiah makes no (recorded) move to get rid of the supposedly offensive altar which Ahaz observed and ordered to be built while visiting Tiglath-Pileser III in Damascus. Additionally, Hezekiah reacts to Assyrian incursion in a very similar way to Ahaz when he strips the temple of golden ornamentation and sends it to the king of Assyria as a sign of capitulation.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Ahaz, who, because of his negative evaluation, has this action framed in such a way as to appear to be submitting himself to the spread of Assyrian influence, Hezekiah faces no such accusation or condemnation. Even more to the point, certain actions of Hezekiah appear to be the continuation of an iconoclastic policy begun under Ahaz. In the same way that Ahaz strips the bronze bulls under the Sea in the Temple courtyard, Hezekiah destroys the bronze snake icon said to have been made by Moses. All of these reasons suggest that a similar motivation forced the Josianic

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<sup>28</sup> For a historical/political reconstruction of the reform of Hezekiah, see Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of the Individual Moral Liability," *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. Baruch Halpern and D.W. Dobson (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1991), 11-107.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Kgs 16:8; 2 Kgs 18:14-16.

historian to the form of the evaluation he chose to use for Ahaz. He could not outright condemn him because his source material presented him in an at least ambivalent, if not positive light. However, he was motivated to give him a negative evaluation because Ahaz was responsible for the capitulation to Assyria against which Josiah's policies seem to be directed.<sup>30</sup> It was the specific act of Ahaz appealing to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III in the face of an impending invasion from Israel and Aram that caused the negative evaluation for him in the Josianic redaction.<sup>31</sup>

### **Kings of Israel**

Another strange feature of the language used to describe Ahaz is the statement accusing him of walking in "the ways of the kings of Israel." While comparison to the kings of Israel is not unique among the Judahite kings, Ahaz is the only evil Judean king between the reign of Ahab and Hezekiah, who would theoretically be the final account in a Hezekian compilation, who is not directly related to Ahab or his line. As there are only three negatively evaluated southern kings between the rules of Ahab and Hezekiah,<sup>32</sup> this may seem to be a small piece of non-uniformity that can be explained away via simple stylistic variation. As with the case of the regnal evaluation, though, there appears to be more meaning than what might be gleaned from a superficial reading.

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Kgs 16:7; Additionally, the Josianic account in Chronicles paints a picture of Josiah fighting to stop an Egyptian-Assyrian alliance. Though the venture would, according to the Chronicler, eventually lead to Josiah's death, this is another example of Josiah's anti-Assyrian policies. See Cogan, *II Kings*, 300-302.

<sup>31</sup> This is further evidenced by the addendum "He did this for the King of Assyria" at the end of description of the major events of his life. If Hezekiah is not held responsible for capitulation to Assyria or for the removal of ornamentation by the historian, the reader should wonder why this might be the case for Ahaz.

<sup>32</sup> This does not include Athaliah. As a queen regent, she seems not to be considered as a "real ruler" in the eyes of the editor and has been intentionally left absent from this list.

The first southern king said to take the throne after the accession of Ahab in Israel is Jehoshaphat.<sup>33</sup> Jehoshaphat maintains a peaceful relationship with Israel<sup>34</sup> and goes so far as to ally himself with them in a war against Mesha, king of Moab.<sup>35</sup> Following the death of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram (of Judah) took the throne.<sup>36</sup> Jehoram is said to have not only walked in the ways of Ahab, but also to have married a daughter of Ahab as well; thus he, and the royal Judahite pedigree, is brought into the direct line of Ahab. Jehoram's son, Ahaziah (of Judah) is said to have "followed the ways of the house of Ahab [...], as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab."<sup>37</sup> The two Judahite kings are mentioned in relation to Ahab because they are literally a part of his line, one by marriage and one by birthright. The history paints a similar picture in regard to the Northern kings. The first king to follow the reign of Ahab in Israel is his son, Ahaziah (of Israel). He "did evil in the eyes of YHWH, because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin." The only other northern king to be compared to Ahab was Jehoram (of Israel), also the son of Ahab. A slightly different picture is painted of Jehoram (of Israel): "He did evil in the eyes of YHWH, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made."<sup>38</sup> While this is a cautiously positive sentiment in an overall negative evaluation, it is still uses Ahab as the point of reference.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Kgs 22:41.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Kgs 22:44.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Kings 3.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Kgs 8:18.

<sup>37</sup> 2 Kgs 8:27.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Kgs 3:1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Halpern and Vanderhooft, 'Editions of Kings,' 202, bring up an excellent point that this shift away from the sins of Ahab and the persistence of 'cleaving' to the sins of Jeroboam play a larger role in the theme of failing to reform existing practices in lieu of intensifying or worsening them.

Logically, it would seem that the references to Ahaz should cease after Jehoram (of Israel)'s account for multiple reasons. Jehoram is said to have shifted in his wrongdoing away from those of the house of Ahab. He "cleaves" steadfast to the sins of Jeroboam, but deviates from those of Ahab. Additionally, with the rise of Jehu and his divine charge from YHWH to wipe out all remaining members of the Omride dynasty, every person with any sort of relation to Ahab is executed.<sup>40</sup> This includes those living in Israel as well as the one (Ahaziah) on the throne in Judah. Ultimately Athaliah is executed as well, though not by Jehu. Because of this, the ability of family members to follow in his footsteps is destroyed. Thus, in the theoretical Hezekian edition that underlies the current Deuteronomistic edition, comparisons to Ahab should (and do) come to an end at this point.

Nevertheless there is one more comparison made to Ahab in the book of Kings, coming in the description of the reign of Ahaz's grandson Manasseh. This king, coming after Hezekiah, would not have been included in the theoretical Hezekian history. Therefore the account should be attributed to one of the later layers of the book of Kings, either the Josianic or Exilic Deuteronomist, with the Josianic being the more likely of the two.<sup>41</sup> Another indication that a different hand may be responsible for Manasseh's comparison to Ahab is the nature of the comparison. Unlike the accounts of those four previous kings who are reported to "walk in the ways of Ahab," a *specific* action of Manasseh is related to Ahab: the building of the Baal and the Asherah.<sup>42</sup> Because of this, he is not truly connected to Ahab, but is only related to a single act.<sup>43</sup> This would indicate

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<sup>40</sup> 2 Kgs 10:1-17.

<sup>41</sup> Friedman, *Exile and Biblical Narrative*, 10-11.

<sup>42</sup> 2 Kgs 21:3.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Kgs 16:30-33.

that the historian is pointing not to a larger conceptual pattern of behavior, as in the cases of Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah, but to a specific deed of Manasseh's. Ahaz is therefore distinct from others in that he is neither explicitly connected to Ahab via bloodline, such as Ahaziah and Jehoram of Israel and Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah, nor are any of his actions specifically connected to Ahab, such as Manasseh.

The meaning, then, of Ahaz's comparison with the kings of Israel is difficult to understand and becomes more so when read alongside the actual account of his reign. Even on the supposition that Ahab is not mentioned in relationship to Ahaz for the reasons posited above, that is that the Omrides had been wiped out and were therefore no longer a historical force, the accusation seems disjointed. "To walk in the way of the kings of Israel" means, in the other accounts to be not only related literally, as described above, but also to be in some type of political concord. And yet, Ahaz is not only not in any sort of *détente* with the Israelites, he is in fact fighting against them in order to preserve his kingship.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the accusation lacks a specific thrust, at either the political or cultic level. This makes it, like the accusation that "he did not do the upright" at least suspicious in terms of its belonging to the Hezekian version of this account. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that the charges immediately preceding and following it can be attributed to the Josianic edition of Kings. This was demonstrated above for his not doing upright, and will be demonstrated next in an examination of the charge of his having committed child sacrifice.

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<sup>44</sup> 2 Kgs 16:5, 7. See also Isa 7:4-6.

## Passing Children Through the Fire

It has already been shown that the evaluation of Ahaz has historiographic connections with the reign of Solomon. Yet a significantly more pertinent tie exists between Ahaz and Manasseh than the connection to the Omride king Ahab. These two rulers, and only these two rulers, are said to have committed the act of child sacrifice, specifically by “passing [them] through fire.”

Ahaz	II Kgs 16:3	<i>wgm 't bnw h 'byr b 'š</i>
Manasseh	II Kgs 21:6	<i>wh 'byr b 'š 't bnw</i>

Before the redaction critical connection of the action between Ahaz and Manasseh can be discussed further, an analysis of the terminology is necessary in light of those who would argue that the aforementioned “passing through fire” refers to something other than child sacrifice, such as a dedicatory ceremony performed to protect the infant.<sup>45</sup> Alone, the verb *'br* in the C stem is not directly related to Child Sacrifice as it occurs quite frequently in the Hebrew Bible. It is the compounding of the verb with *b 'š* (through fire) that generates the sacrificial connotation. The phrase occurs six times, five times in the Deuteronomistic History and once in Ezekiel.<sup>46</sup> In every use of the phrase, the context displays a situation which clearly connotes child sacrifice. Further, a comparison of Deut 18:10 with Deut 12:31, one of which uses the verb under consideration here (*'br* in the C) and the other of which uses the verb *šrp*, to burn, in the exact same situation, clearly

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<sup>45</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “The Moloch Cult in Israel and Its Background,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1969), 141. For a direct response, see Morton Smith, “A Note on Burning Babies,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975), 478. For a response to this response, see Moshe Weinfeld, “Burning Babies in Ancient Israel: A Rejoinder to Morton Smith’s Article in JAOS 95 (1975), pp. 477-479,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 10 (1978), 412.

<sup>46</sup> Deut 18:10, 2 Kgs 16:3, 17:17, 21:6, 23:10, Ezek 20:31.



shows the meaning of this phrase. This supports the most natural reading of this phrase, namely that it is a way of speaking about child sacrifice. Additionally, there are no clues other than arguments from silence and under-supported evidence from rabbinic commentators that can be used to hypothesize alternative interpretations of the phrase.

Having demonstrated that child sacrifice is what is in view in both the Ahaz and Manasseh passages, Ahaz and Manasseh are both said to make a child *wh'br b'sh*. The next problem that must be addressed, though, is the severity of the alleged offense.

While both are accused of the same action, the terms of the accusations must be discerned in order to understand the connection between the two. Prior to the levying of the child sacrifice charge in 16:3, as previously discussed, it is said that Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. It then attributes the act of child sacrifice to those who dwelled in the land before the children of Israel. Manasseh's crimes, alternatively, are far more closely related to divination and necromancy of some kind. This hearkens directly to the language used in the Deuteronomic law code in Deuteronomy 18 as well as the reasons for YHWH's destruction of the northern kingdom in 2 Kings 17. The level of crossover in language between Manasseh's crimes, the charges levied in 2 Kings 17, and Deuteronomy 18 is astounding. Yet the accusation against Ahaz stands out precisely because it lacks any connection to divination or necromancy as seen in the Manasseh account, the peroration on the fall of Israel, and the law against child sacrifice in the Deuteronomic code.

It is indeed strange that Ahaz is the first king against whom the charge of child sacrifice is levied and yet 2 Kg 17:17 clearly blames all of Israel for the crime and lists it as a defining reason for their ultimate demise. No other king, Israelite or Judean is

explicitly said to have sacrificed children.<sup>47</sup> The reader must ask why the historian chose to include this charge specifically against Ahaz when it appears not only possible, but probable, that this was not the first incident of the act occurring in a royal setting. If the Josianic redactor did indeed alter the Ahaz account in an effort to present him negatively, it is possible that the charge of child sacrifice was added by this editor as well and is reflective of a change in climate of how child sacrifice was viewed from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Having said this, it is necessary to explore the development of attitudes towards child sacrifice in ancient Israel and Judah. Specifically, there seems to have been a shift in the acceptability of this practice between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because the Hezekian source that theoretically underlies the book of Kings in Ahaz's account would have been from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible that child sacrifice would have been greeted approvingly or ambivalently, rather than negatively. On the other hand, by Josiah's reform in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, this practice was no longer considered an acceptable part of the worship of YHWH. To illustrate this change in attitudes, it is necessary to step outside of the Deuteronomistic History for a moment and examine passages that deal with child sacrifice from the Pentateuch and Latter Prophets. The J and E sources of the Torah, which should responsibly be dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century or prior,<sup>48</sup> are at best ambivalent to child sacrifice.<sup>49</sup> It can easily be argued that the E source considers child sacrifice as a

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<sup>47</sup> This even includes Ahab, who is described as the most devastatingly evil ruler of either kingdom. It would seem that he, the person who allowed Ba'al worship to run rampant within his kingdom and who married the Phoenician Jezebel, would be a perfect candidate for an accusation such as this.

<sup>48</sup> Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (New York: Harper One, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> The J source provides redemption clauses for the sacrifice of the child but the language is significantly more suggestive than imperative.

mandatory part of the worship of YHWH.<sup>50</sup> Mic 6:7 presents the practice in a neutral way, a theoretical offering in deference to YHWH.<sup>51</sup> Isaiah, when he visits Ahaz before the oncoming invasion of the Israelite and Aramean rulers, says nothing to Ahaz concerning the supposed sacrifice of his first born. Not only this, but in the interaction between the two, absolutely nothing negative is said about supposedly evil king. Isaiah, who, narratively speaking, would be in the perfect position to wax poetic on the sins of Ahaz, merely delivers to him a prophesy of defeat for Damascus and Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians from YHWH.<sup>52</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> century sources treat the discussion quite differently in that they are staunchly against the concept. In a mirroring of language to the standard evaluation formulae of Kings, Jeremiah 7 states that “The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes [...] They have built the high places of Tophet in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command,

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<sup>50</sup> An, as of yet, unpublished paper of mine. Also, for source division, see Friedman, *Bible with Sources*, 64-66, 177-179. While material commonly attributed to the J source (**Cite Verses**) contain redemption clauses in instances where child sacrifice is required, material that belongs to the E source (**Cite Verses**) contain no such opportunities for exchange or redemption.

<sup>51</sup> Some would argue that this is a rhetorical device used by the author and that this construction is intended to be an increasing display of offers that eventually border on the most ludicrous and detestable: the sacrifice of the firstborn child. See Roland de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), 69.

Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, trans. R. Scheimann, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (New York: Harper and Row, 1967 [German Original 1956]) 181. This is due, in part, to the offers of “thousands of rams” and “tens of thousands of rivers of oil.” This may be read hyperbolically, but evidence exists for an alternative reading. Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Micah*, Anchor Bible Commentary 24E, (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 532-539, argue that the language present in v. 6, namely the inability of the phrase “my firstborn” to refer to Israel as a collective, connotes a small, idealistic practice reserved for the most dire of circumstance and is indicative of extreme devotion to YHWH. See also Paul G. Mosca, *Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion*, Unpublished Harvard PhD Dissertation, 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Isa 7:14. Here lie echoes of the account of Isaiah’s visit to Hezekiah, a decidedly “good” king in 2 Kgs 19:1-7. See also Isa 8:4.

<sup>53</sup> Some would argue that 8:5-18 is a negative assessment of the Assyrian alliance. However, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, Anchor Bible Commentary 19, (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 236-242, persuasively argues that this is, in fact, speaking directly about Ahaz hypothetically joining in on the Syro-Emphramite Coalition. For an alternative view, see Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 110-116.

nor did it enter my mind.”<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah 19 also displays YHWH as opposed to and disgusted with child sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> Ezekiel 16 professes that child sacrifice was indeed previously a widespread problem among the people.<sup>56</sup> Ezekiel 20 goes on to say, in opposition to the words of Jeremiah, that the people were actually commanded to take part in human sacrifice by YHWH but that it was a divine punishment caused by the rebellious actions of the Israelites.<sup>57</sup> This difference in opinions of authors dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively, indicates a ubiquitous change in the view of child sacrifice during this period. A clear shift from ambivalence to decisive rejection of the practice can be traced simply by dating the sources outside of the regnal accounts of Kings and tracing the opinions therein. When this evidence is considered, it is highly probable that the reason that no kings before Ahaz were mentioned as having sacrificed their children is because it was a normative part of Israelite religion and was not out of the ordinary. Only because the Josianic redactor was living in a time when they had a specific reason to react negatively against Ahaz and his introduction of Assyrian vassalage and when opinion of child sacrifice was decidedly negative, that such a charge was used as further evidence to display Ahaz as an idolatrous, evil king.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the historiographic nature of the typically unexamined Judean king, Ahaz, via: 1) The rhetoric used in the regnal evaluations, the ways in which the specific account deviated from the established formulae, and the connection that

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<sup>54</sup> Jer 7:30-3.

<sup>55</sup> Jer 19:1-9.

<sup>56</sup> Ezek 16:20-22.

<sup>57</sup> Ezek 20:24-26

exists with Solomon; 2) The reference of Ahaz to the kings of Israel and the reasoning for a lack of connection to the negatively evaluated Omride king Ahab; and 3) the rare direct accusation of Child Sacrifice which, other than Ahaz, is only levied against Manasseh. The evidence for a negative Josianic redaction of an initial positive evaluation is not only copious, but also certainly deserving of the close examination that is regularly given to the like of Manasseh, Jehu, and others. The negative evaluation levied at the onset of the Ahaz narrative must be taken at more than face value and the remainder of the account must be observed independently without the presupposition that all of the proceeding actions are inherently corrupt.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE TREATMENT OF AHAZ IN THE ORACLES OF ISAIAH 7

As stated in section one of this study, the first of three major narrative accounts in the Hebrew Bible discussing the Judean king Ahaz, 2 Kings 16, can logically be interpreted in such a manner as to dramatically shift the way that the reader views the king. His actions, when evaluated independently of the regnal assessment of the historian, appear in a much more favorable light. It appears that the negative assessment on the part of the Josianic Deuteronomist creates problems for the view of the king in the prophetic material as well. Within scholarship, there is a trend of reading Isaiah 7 in such a way that views the relationship between Ahaz and the prophet Isaiah as adversarial.<sup>58</sup> The majority of commenters theorize that the prophet meets the king with round derision and displays contempt of Ahaz's actions, which must be both politically and cultically untenable. This assumption unknowingly relies heavily on the Deuteronomistic material.

This study previously revealed that the actual narrative contained in the Kings' account of Ahaz's reign can be read positively when the later editorializations are removed. It will now be demonstrated that a similar methodology of assessing the text of

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<sup>58</sup> The vast majority of scholarship sees portions (if not all) of this oracle to be a complete condemnation of Ahaz. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 235-236. Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 62-69. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 159-163. John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2001), 63-68. For an alternative view, see Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

Isaiah apart from the evaluation of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 can show that the Ahaz material in Isaiah is not only not a necessarily negatively charged indictment of Ahaz on the part of the prophet, but rather encouragement meant to bolster the king in the face of impending danger and destruction. Therefore, the goals of this chapter are therefore threefold: 1) To assess the material in Isaiah 7 on its own terms without allowing other accounts of Ahaz to determine the interpretation;<sup>59</sup> 2) To ultimately take the assessment of Isaiah and cross reference it with the earlier material from 2 Kings to obtain a clearer picture about the accusations levied against Ahaz; and 3) To show that the interactions between Ahaz and Isaiah which are typically referred to as inflammatory in nature are actually moments in which the prophet both comforts Ahaz and predicts doom for Judah's attackers, Aram and Israel.

According to the editorial framework of the chapter, the events of Isaiah 7 occur simultaneously (or slightly before) those of 2 Kings 16:5-9.<sup>60</sup> In light of the encroaching armies of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance led by Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel,<sup>61</sup> Ahaz faced a dire dilemma.<sup>62</sup> Choosing to side with the Syro-Ephraimite alliance would inevitably bring the army of Assyria to Judah's doorstep. Alternatively, choosing to

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<sup>59</sup> This would include the notion that Ahaz is meant to be portrayed as inherently evil because of the Deuteronomistic material.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 229 suggests that because of the similarities in accounts, the author of each must have shared an unknown historical vorlage. The evidence for such a text is tenuous. Many scholars have attempted to attribute other portions of Isaiah (Isa 3:1-15, 5:25-29) to the context of the Syro-Ephraimite war. While these may, in fact, be well made attributions, 7:1-17 is the only portion of the text that explicitly mentions Ahaz. Additionally, many view 7:18-25 as being directed not towards Ahaz, but the Judean people. See Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimite*, 114.

<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that at every individual juncture in which they are linked, Rezin is consistently mentioned before Pekah.

<sup>62</sup> While there is disagreement over the compositional history of Isa 7:1-17, the context is widely agreed to be the crisis posed by the anti-Assyrian Syro-Ephraimite crisis. While it is conceivable that the events of this text take place at an earlier point in the reign of Ahaz, the consistent grouping of Aram with Ephraim and Rezin with Pekah plainly shows the reader that the scene is to be understood as the beginnings of an invasion into Judah, a critical decision point for Ahaz.

forgo an alliance with the unified anti-Assyrian coalition of smaller neighboring nations and deciding instead to capitulate to Assyria would create a rift between Judah and its neighbors.<sup>63</sup> Ahaz faced the stark possibility of defeat and subsequently being replaced by a king who would act in a way significantly more advantageous to the victors. Ultimately, according to all available accounts,<sup>64</sup> Ahaz decided to side with Assyria and faced the reality of an invasion at the hands of his neighbors to the north. It is in this historical context, one of dire circumstances and immanent invasion, that Ahaz is said to have been visited by the prophet Isaiah.

### **Isaiah 7:2-9**

Isaiah 7 begins with an introductory clause reminiscent of those found in Kings used to introduce each ruler.<sup>65</sup> Isaiah is clearly presented as offering support to Ahaz in verses 2-7. Isa 7:1 is quite similar to 2 Kgs 16:5 in that both describe the Syro-Ephraimite attack against Judah. Notably, though, while Ahaz is the one being besieged in 2 Kgs 16:5, it is instead Jerusalem that is the direct object in Isa 7:1. Additionally, Isa 7:1 appears to be proleptic in nature as it displays the end result of the conflict that is described in the remainder of chapter 7. Though some take this as an editorial addition

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<sup>63</sup> Roger Tames, "The Reason for the Syro-Ephraimite War," *JSOT* 59 (1993) 55-71, suggests that, in reality, the entire conflict was a simple border dispute between neighboring countries and was completely unrelated to Assyria.

<sup>64</sup> 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28, Isaiah 7.

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, unlike the typical regnal ascension formula in Kings, the lineage of Ahaz is taken back two generations by mentioning both his father, Jotham, and his grandfather, Uzziah. This occurs in contrast with the typical single generation antecedent. While the reasoning behind this could be construed in such a way as to denote an important feature of the reign of the king, the explanation is, more than likely, much more simple. It can likely be attributed to the fact that, due to Uzziah's skin condition which rendered him ineligible to rule, Jotham ruled as co-regent until Uzziah's death. Therefore, both were named as the antecedent to Ahaz.



due to the nature of the verse,<sup>66</sup> the significantly more likely explanation is that it is intended to provide complete context for the ensuing information.<sup>67</sup> It is on this basis, the intended function of the verse as a provider of context rather than source division, that Isa 7:1 is separated from the remaining sections.

Isaiah's involvement begins in earnest with his divine charge from YHWH in verse 3. He is told to visit *'l qsh t 'lt hbrkh h 'lywnh 'l mslt šdh cwbs*. Translated as "the conduit of the Upper Pool near the highway of the fuller's field,"<sup>68</sup> the highly specific name of the location is used for the first of two times in Isa 7:3, the second occurring in Isa 36:2.<sup>69</sup> He is additionally told by YHWH to bring his son, Shear-Jashub,<sup>70</sup> with him to the meeting.<sup>71</sup> Debate swirls around both the meaning of the inclusion of Isaiah's son in this visit and the implications of the child's name as being indicative of his role in the larger oracle. While some view the name of the son of Isaiah as a threat to Ahaz of impending destruction against Judah due to capitulation to Assyria,<sup>72</sup> others see it instead as a threat against the armies of Rezin and Pekah,<sup>73</sup> because the armies of Aram and

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<sup>66</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> It should be a solely because a verse displays a prolepsis, it does not indicate a secondary addition. Very rarely is such a claim made that the entirety of a historical prologue in the regnal accounts in Kings and Chronicles is a secondary addition to be separated from the remainder of the following text solely because it provides context. It is likely a simple stylistic choice on the part of the author. Such use of prolepses occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>68</sup> This is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where a specific street is named in or near Jerusalem. The significance of such usage arguably adds to the importance of the narrative.

<sup>69</sup> Immediately noticeable is the strong narrative connection present with the Hezekian narrative of Isaiah present in chapters 36-39. The place where Ahaz is visited by Isaiah is the same location in which Hezekiah is visited by the Assyrian messenger, the Rab-Shaqeh. This usage creates a narrative congruency within two portions of the text.

<sup>70</sup> Translated as "a remnant will return."

<sup>71</sup> Isa 7:3.

<sup>72</sup> Meir Weiss, "The Contribution of Literary Criticism to Biblical Research: Illustrated by the Problem of She'ar-Yashub," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 31 (1986), 373-377.

<sup>73</sup> R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 83. J.J.M. Roberts, "Isaiah and His Children," in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, ed. A. Kort and S. Morschauser (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1985), 200-201. John Day, "Shear-Jashub (Isaiah vii 3) and the Remnant of Wrath (Psalm lxxvi 11)," *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no.1 (1981), 76-78.

Israel march against Judah and YHWH, only a broken remnant shall return to their homeland after suffering defeat.<sup>74</sup> If the name signifies destruction for Judah, this would operate directly against the narrative context of this section and stand contradictory to the promises of Isaiah in 7:7-9. A third option exists, that the name of the child is not meaningful and does represent a larger message on the part of the author. However, this would deny a common theme within this section of Isaiah: the names of children mentioned as symbolic markers within the text.<sup>75</sup> The weight of evidence falls on the idea that the name Shear-Jashub, if it is intended to signify a larger point, indicates good tidings for Ahaz.

The prophet opens his speech to Ahaz with several appeals: take heed, listen, do not fear,<sup>76</sup> do not be fainthearted.<sup>77</sup> Interpreters tend to view these commands in two ways. Some postulate that this appeal on the part of Isaiah is made in an effort to persuade Ahaz to take no defensive measures at all in the face of incoming destruction on the part of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition; he should faithfully await the divine destruction of YHWH to reign down upon those who would attack Jerusalem.<sup>78</sup> This recommendation would not be out of character for Isaiah, as similar advice is given to

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<sup>74</sup> Jesper Hogenhaven, "The Prophet Isaiah and Judaeen Foreign Policy under Ahaz and Hezekiah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49, no. 4 (Oct 1990), 352. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 83. J Day, "Shear Jashub," 76-78. They claim that this is a prophecy that not only spells doom for Aram and Israel, but ensures longevity in the reign of Ahaz and the remainder of the Davidic line.

<sup>75</sup> Isa 7:3, 14, 8:3-4.

<sup>76</sup> šqt (hiphil). Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 138, insists that this is a direct allusion to Deuteronomistic War Theology present in Deut 20:2-4 in which a priest commands an army to abstain from faintheartedness before battle. It is true that šqt can signify a rest from war. The root in the G-stem is consistently used in the book of Judges to indicate a rest from war for the tribes of Israel (Jdg 3:11, 30, 5:31, 8:28, 18:7, 18:27). However, the root appears to have a much wider usage than applying simply to a respite from war. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 231, persuasively counters Kaiser, stating that this type of command is seen throughout the ANE in times of distress and thus serves as proof for independence from the Deuteronomimic tradition. It seems that the root is far too common to assign such a narrow domain of meaning.

<sup>77</sup> Isa 7:4.

<sup>78</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1951), 57-58. Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja I* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1966), 107.

Hezekiah later when he faces invasion from Sennacherib and the Assyrian army despite the differing circumstances of the two narratives.<sup>79</sup> Others claim the purpose of these appeals was a direct, though not explicitly stated, warning against entreating Assyria for assistance.<sup>80</sup> This hypothesis requires taking from the text something which is not stated (or even implied) and appears to result from a bias caused from reading the narrative in 2 Chronicles 28 retrogressively into this oracle.<sup>81</sup> The problem at hand, the Syro-Ephraimite coalition threatening the borders of Judah, and not the possible difficulties caused by Assyrian involvement, would contextually be a far greater threat for the king. Additionally, if the hypothesis that Isaiah advocates for a lack of defensive preparation against Aram and Israel were taken to its logical end, a theoretical appeal to Assyria, which is in no way mentioned in this oracle, would make putting Judean troops in the field unnecessary.<sup>82</sup> Isaiah warns Ahaz against the dangers of joining the Syro-Ephraimite coalition against Assyria, not appealing to Assyria for help. Ultimately, Isaiah delivers to Ahaz divinely-inspired words of assurance not to fear the impending incursion of foes as they are destined to fail. Just as two firebrands will ultimately smolder into harmlessness if left for long enough, so too would Israel and Aram fail.<sup>83</sup> The scheme of Rezin to

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<sup>79</sup> Isa 37:1-7. The prophecy in the Hezekiah is framed somewhat differently. In Isaiah 7:7, the force responsible for the destruction of Rezin and Pekah is ambiguous. It simply notes that the invasion will not be successful. For Isaiah 37, Hezekiah is faced with a similar problem as he awaits an invasion from Assyria. Isaiah comforts Hezekiah by stating that YHWH will send the Assyrian king back to his land and cause him to die by the sword. The force responsible for the defeat of the enemies of the Judean king is directly stated to be YHWH.

<sup>80</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 132.

<sup>81</sup> 2 Chronicles 28 is the only text discussing Ahaz which frames the appeal of Ahaz to Assyria in an inarguably negative light.

<sup>82</sup> The notion of Assyria acting as an instrument of the divine will resurface later in this chapter.

<sup>83</sup> Isa 7:7-8. Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimite*, 151.

spearhead a movement aimed at the heart of Assyrian dominance would fail and Ahaz would not be replaced by a more pliable ruler.<sup>84</sup>

The discourse on the part of Isaiah seems to be, to this point, one of encouragement made in an effort to hearten Ahaz. The oracle ends, however, on a note of trepidation that differentiates itself in tone from the previous material within the oracle. Scholars typically translate the end of Isa 7:9 as “if you do not stand firm in faith,<sup>85</sup> you will not stand at all”<sup>86</sup> and assert that this is a warning to Ahaz that if he chooses to side with Assyria instead of trusting in YHWH, he will surely fall.<sup>87</sup> Even those who see no trace of discussion of an Assyrian alliance prior to this take this statement as a warning against such action.<sup>88</sup> Blenkinsopp argues that Ahaz was told to be careful not to relinquish himself to the coalition, something he did not necessarily show any sign of doing, but also to avoid falling in league with Assyria, something not mentioned by the prophet.<sup>89</sup>

The problem with these interpretations is that those commenting on this specific verse make no discussion of the verb usage in the final statement of Isa 7:9. They assume that because Ahaz is being addressed at the beginning of the oracle, he is necessarily being addressed at its close. However, this picture is significantly more clouded than

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<sup>84</sup> The matter of the planned replacement of Ahaz is widely debated. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 230 claims that the replacement would surely be an Ammonite prince, citing Albright among others. Alternatively, Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 153-155, outlines several views that Tubail, prince of Tyre would be the most likely candidate. He cites the the Judean people accepting Athaliah, a granddaughter of Ittoba'al of Sidon, as a ruler as a precedent for a Phoenician regent.

<sup>85</sup> Translating *'mn* (hiphil) as “standing firm in faith” is evidence that translators are reading their alleged negativity of Ahaz within the verse into their own translations.

<sup>86</sup> Isa 7:9. The root *'mn* occurs twice in this verse, first in the hiphil and then the niphal.

<sup>87</sup> G. Von Rad, *Heilige Krieg*, 138-143.

<sup>88</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 232.

<sup>89</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 231. Strangely, only Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 159, takes this to be a warning against falling in league with Aram instead of Assyria.

scholars might admit. The verb *'mn* in this statement is in the second person plural in both instances and therefore cannot solely be addressing Ahaz, a fact that appears to be widely ignored.<sup>90</sup> This is further evidenced by the fact that all of the imperatives levied at Ahaz earlier in the oracle are in the second person singular, not the plural. Another option must explain the meaning of the final statement of this oracle. It is possible that the persons discussed in Isa 7:8-9, Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, are the ones being addressed by this statement. They are clearly the subject of the larger clause and are already predicted to fail in their goal of deposing Ahaz. The purpose of the oracle would thus be twofold. It would be an assurance to Ahaz that he will not be deposed and replaced by Tabeel. It would also promise Aram and Israel that if they should attempt an invasion and do not trust in the words of YHWH, they will not be upheld. Furthermore, to assert that the kingship of Ahaz and the continuation of the Davidic line is dependent on the trust of Ahaz would be to undercut the promise of Isa 7:7. It is explicitly stated that Aram and Israel will not be victorious in replacing Ahaz should they choose to invade.

The point that an anti-Assyrian subtext may exist in this warning is not viable, as it must be observed that at absolutely no point during the first recorded encounter of Isaiah and Ahaz does the prophet explicitly warn against the Assyrian empire. One may construe the messages of YHWH and Isaiah as serving as a veiled warning against the yoke of Assyrian vassalage, but the text itself indicates otherwise. The text explicitly states that Ahaz should remain strong in the face of Rezin and Pekah, the immediate

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<sup>90</sup> Isa 7:9.

danger.<sup>91</sup> If an appeal to Assyria is necessary in order to repel this danger threatening deposition of Ahaz, there is no explicit condemnation of this course of action.

### **Isaiah 7:10-17**

Though Assyria is much more clearly alluded to in the next narrative section, there is no indication that Isa 7:2-9,10-17 form a cohesive narrative unit and must be treated together.<sup>92</sup> Nothing forces the reader to understand these sections as a single conversation or as two speeches which occur within a short period of time. The conclusion of the first segment of the narrative hinges the future of the Davidic dynasty itself on the decision of Ahaz.

Following the narrative break after verse 9, Isaiah begins a second oracle to Ahaz.<sup>93</sup> While the oracle provided by Isaiah to Ahaz in verses 3-9 appears to be an attempt to assuage the worried king, the second section appears much more adversarial in nature. Following the incipit “And again YHWH spoke to Ahaz,” the prophet offers a sign to the king: anything that he might desire to see, YHWH will fulfill for him. The offering of a sign reinforces the theory that the oracle in Isaiah 7:3-6 is wholly positive and in no way a rejection of Ahaz. If Ahaz had already fallen out of favor with YHWH

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<sup>91</sup> Hogenhaven, *Foreign Policies*, 353, goes so far as to suggest that in this section, Isaiah is simultaneously denouncing the rebellious actions of Rezin and Pekah as well as actually sanctioning a pro-Assyrian course of action for Ahaz.

<sup>92</sup> It must be stated that an argument is not being made in terms of authorship, merely the manner in which the oracles are meant to be understood in terms of the narrative continuity of the received text. Though an examination of the source division of this material would be pertinent to a larger, more exhaustive work, it would not prove fruitful for the purposes of this study.

<sup>93</sup> In addition to the change in tone, nearly all major commentators on the books cry narrative disunity as verse 10 disrupts the overall flow of the chapter. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 232; Childs, *Isaiah*, 62-63; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 154-155; Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 64-65; Greg Goswell, “Royal Names and Wordplay in Isaiah 7,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 75 (2013), 104. For an alternative view, cite Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 159-161.

by entertaining an appeal to Assyria, a charge which is in no way levied against him, there would be no reason for YHWH (and by proxy Isaiah) to offer such an opportunity. Though the sign itself did not necessarily need to be supernatural, the choice is framed in such a way that it leaves even the most phenomenal possibilities open for the king.<sup>94</sup>

In response to the offering of a sign, Ahaz declines, claiming that he chooses not to test YHWH. Isaiah then delivers a seemingly scathing riposte against Ahaz. Scholars are quick to point out that the only way that this could make narrative sense is if Isaiah is angered by this response and predicts future misfortunes for the king and the Davidic line.<sup>95</sup>

One could easily interpret the text in such a way; a cursory reading of the narrative while operating under the presupposition that Ahaz is, by definition, objectionable can result in such impressions. However, there is another way to read this text; removing the negative characterization of Ahaz in the prologue of 2 Kings 16 from one's mind is essential. In order to do this, it is necessary to explore the larger biblical context of Ahaz's specific response to Isaiah and what his exact phrasing implies. While Ahaz does refuse when offered a sign from YHWH by Isaiah, he says: *l' š' l wl' 'nsh 't yhwh* ("I will not ask and I will not test YHWH").<sup>96</sup> The testing (*nsh* piel) of YHWH is a rare occurrence in the Hebrew Bible. Famously, the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness are said to have put YHWH to the test in Exodus 17 by claiming that Moses had wrongly brought them out of

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<sup>94</sup> This is especially true when one considers the supernatural nature of the sign received by Hezekiah later in Isa 38:7-8.

<sup>95</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 65.

Childs goes so far as to suggest that any interpretation that strays from the claim that Isaiah is completely rejects Ahaz is "hopelessly anachronistic and theologically inert." As it has been and will be further demonstrated, this view is patently narrow-minded and fallacious.

<sup>96</sup> Isa 7:12

Egypt.<sup>97</sup> Though their immediate needs were ultimately met by Moses providing them with water, the location of the event was named Massah due to their quarreling.<sup>98</sup> In this story, the testing of YHWH is clearly not a positive thing. This event is even used as an example of what not to do in Deut 6:16 by Moses as he warns the Israelites not to fall into the trap of testing YHWH. The event is further referenced throughout Psalms,<sup>99</sup> always used as an example of the Israelites' disobedience.

Another narrative concerning a test of YHWH also occurs during the wanderings in the wilderness, this time in Numbers 14. Moses and Aaron face open rebellion at the hand of the Israelites who, just as in the narrative of the testing at Massah in Exodus 17, were complaining that it would have been better for them to have been left in Egypt.<sup>100</sup> The Israelites are shown going so far as to discuss electing another leader, stoning Moses,<sup>101</sup> and returning to bondage. It is in the midst of this rebellion that the spirit of YHWH descends upon them in fury. Threatening the mutineers with plague and destruction while promising victory to the faithful, YHWH is begged forgiveness by Moses on the part of the wayward people.<sup>102</sup> Because Moses appealed to the abounding love and forgiveness of YHWH, he stayed his hand and chose not to destroy the Israelites.<sup>103</sup> Though he does not inflict devastation upon them, he does claim that none of those who rose up against Moses and acted unfaithfully would reach the promise land.

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<sup>97</sup> Exod 17:2,7.

<sup>98</sup> Exod 17:7.

<sup>99</sup> Pss 78:18,41,56; 106:14.

<sup>100</sup> Num 14:3.

<sup>101</sup> Num 14: 10. Moses feared stoning in Exodus 17 as well.

<sup>102</sup> Num 14:13-16.

<sup>103</sup> Num 14:17-19.



In making this statement, YHWH equates the faithlessness of those who rose up against Moses with testing the divine.<sup>104</sup>

The only remaining instance of testing the divine in the Hebrew Bible is the story of Gideon in Judges 6. Upon being greeted by a *ml'k yhwh*,<sup>105</sup> Gideon offers a sacrifice to YHWH in order to prove the identity of the messenger. After being granted this sign, he prepared for battle against the Midianites.<sup>106</sup> As he prepares for battle, he request another sign, which is granted in turn. It is finally after the completion of this second sign that Gideon poses, in his own words, a test for YHWH.<sup>107</sup> It is apparent, though, that despite being granted these requests, Gideon sees his actions as overreaching and crossing the line of acceptability due to his imploring YHWH not to flare his anger against him.<sup>108</sup> While it is true the Gideon successfully “tests” YHWH, the unique aspect of the narrative is the very fact that he is allowed to do this. It is because he boldly requests a sign, is granted it, and then goes so far as to request another that his story is noteworthy.

When Ahaz is presented with the option of a sign, though a generous gift it may be, he apparently deems it as testing YHWH. Commentators frequently, reading the negative account of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 and making the assumption that it holds true, question the sincerity of Ahaz’s rejection.<sup>109</sup> They point out that, due to Isaiah’s initial

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<sup>104</sup> Num 14:22. Further, the Israelites are said to test YHWH ten times.

<sup>105</sup> Judg 6:12.

<sup>106</sup> Judg 6:33-35.

<sup>107</sup> Judg 6:39.

<sup>108</sup> Judg 6:39.

<sup>109</sup> Isaiah 7:12. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 97-99. Childs, *Isaiah*, 65. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 64. Kaiser likens the attitude of Ahaz looking upon Isaiah in this interaction with the way in which Amaziah viewed Amos: a king presented with a religious fanatic that would ultimately cause a dangerous impact on the population. The overreaching nature of such an assertion does not present enough evidence to warrant a response, only quiet rejection.

reaction to Ahaz's rebuff, the king must have lacked sincerity in his reply. This claim is further due to Isaiah's seemingly exasperated response.<sup>110</sup> Though Isaiah does clearly react negatively to the words of the king, this does not necessarily indicate inadequate piety on the part of Ahaz. Special care should be taken as to the particular language of Isa 7:13. Isaiah refers to the wearying of men as well as the wearying of the divine. Isaiah appears to suggest that the exasperation is his own and, because he speaks with the authority of the divine, YHWH's by extension. Despite this reaction, whether it be his or YHWH's, Isaiah proceeds in delivering an oracle to Ahaz.<sup>111</sup>

The seemingly negative retort to Ahaz's refusal of the sign often colors the view of the widely debated "Immanuel Oracle" that dominates the remainder of this section.<sup>112</sup> Many claim that because Isaiah persists in delivering an oracle to Ahaz, despite his stated desire not to test YHWH's power, this must be a sign of judgment against Ahaz.<sup>113</sup> Though a seemingly convincing interpretation of the response at first glance, upon further examination it is clear that no narrative parallels exist within the Hebrew Bible from which to draw such a conclusion. To assume that Isaiah's delivery of the oracle despite Ahaz's request not to receive it is inherently negatively motivated is further evidence that scholars are all too willing to allow the material in Kings to color the way they view the narratives in Isaiah.<sup>114</sup> If Israelite religion tended to view testing YHWH as resulting in

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<sup>110</sup> Isa 7:13-14.

<sup>111</sup> Isa 7:14-17.

<sup>112</sup> As one of the more widely discussed pieces of biblical literature from an intertestamental perspective, the Immanuel narrative is rife with exegetical questions begging (by some) to be answered. While this section will tackle some of them, other less applicable ideas will remain unaddressed in the interest of brevity.

<sup>113</sup> Gosswell, "Royal Names," 107. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 98. While this is not a terrible inference to make based on the overall tone of the text, the position is overstated and based more on a presumptive reading of the text than hard evidence.

<sup>114</sup> Further, those who would argue the first point also contend that Isaiah's use of *lkn* as an incipit to the Immanuel oracle automatically denotes negativity because it "often, but not exclusively, introduces a

retribution, it is baseless to attack Ahaz's motives when there is no clear indication that they are intended to be displayed as dishonest. If Ahaz indeed lacks piety, refusing a sign from YHWH would be a truly strange way to display it. A case can easily be made that Ahaz's refusal of the sign is a representation of piety rather than disaffection and that the negative response is that of the prophet alone, not YHWH.

Questions persist as to what portion of the oracle should be considered the most important piece of information: the birth of the child to an *'lmh*,<sup>115</sup> the diet of the child,<sup>116</sup> the name of the child, or some combination therein. Forgoing the discussion of both the *'almh*<sup>117</sup> and the food consumed by the child,<sup>118</sup> the discussion will instead focus on the name of the prophesied child: Immanuel.<sup>119</sup> Translated as "El with us," the name possibly carries larger implications for the overall oracle, just as the son of Isaiah, Sherrashub, did in the first oracle from the prophet.<sup>120</sup> Just as with the name of the son in Isa

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pronouncement of judgment. The insistence that such a common word would carry such a weighty connotation in every instance is far too speculative to be considered a possibility. See Gosswell, "Royal Names," 106.

<sup>115</sup> Scholarly debate persists on the meaning of *'lmh* as it applies to the specific context of this verse. Some, those who mainly have a vested interest in connecting this oracle with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ in the gospels, claim that the word means "virgin," thus making the birth truly miraculous. This point is further made due to the LXX use of the word *παρθένος* and the VUL use of *virgo*, which are commonly understood to mean virgin. Others insist that the word simply means "young woman." The weight of linguistic evidence falls on the latter. Gosswell, "Royal Names," 107 interestingly notes that a possible reason for the use of *'lmh* instead of the much more common *btlh* is because the former creates a paronomastic relationship with *lm'lh* ("as high as the height") in v. 11b. For further conversation on the pertinence of the *'lmh*, see Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 168-169; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 222-223. Childs, *Isaiah*, 66-67.

<sup>116</sup> Comparisons can be made to the diet of David and his men (2 Samuel 17) after they are driven from Jerusalem by Absalom's revolt.

<sup>117</sup> Though the birth of a child to a virgin would indeed be a miraculous sign, it would not necessarily play a role in the larger oracle being given by Isaiah.

<sup>118</sup> It appears to be the type of soft fare consumed by an infant and thus seems representative of the young age of the child, nothing more. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 88. Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 166.

<sup>119</sup> For discussion of why the name of the child is the most important aspect of the oracle, see: Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 87; John Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's in a Name?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 30, no. 2 (1987), 295; Gosswell, "Royal Names," 106. For an opposing view, see Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 166-170.

<sup>120</sup> Isa 7:3.

7: 3, arguments persist as to whether the name Immanuel implies good tidings for Ahaz or impending doom.<sup>121</sup> The notion that the name signifies ill tidings is typically coupled with a negative interpretation of the oracle in Isa 7:2-9 and the decided implications of the name Shear-Jashub. They deem that because only a remnant will remain after Judah is attacked, the name Immanuel implies that YHWH will be with only that special remnant. Excluded from this remnant would be Ahaz and all those who believe in his cause.

Alternatively, some scholars suggest that the name “El with us” has a much more narrow meaning than it might initially seem.<sup>122</sup> They claim that because Ahaz is considered by Isaiah to be outside the “circle of faith” of true Israelite religion and is instead relying on the strength of the Assyrians in the stead of YHWH, he is not truly a part of the aforementioned “us” that the name suggests. Instead of meaning “God is with us,” it rather means “God is with us” with an implied addendum of “who trust what I have to say.” This requires culling more from the text than is available. There is nothing explicitly stated by the prophet that can legitimize such a contention based solely on the name of the child. The simplest and most straightforward reading of the text would result in the notion that the name of the child signifies good omens for those who are hearing the oracle. The promise of YHWH remaining with the people, specifically while facing such a crisis as the Syro-Ephraimite war, would surely be a welcome one to all who might hear it.<sup>123</sup> While arguments persist about the meaning of the details of the life of

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<sup>121</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 68-69.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Wegner, *An Examination of Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992), 125-127. Gosswell, “Royal Names,” 106.

<sup>123</sup> Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 88. J.J. Collins, “The Sign of Immanuel,” in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day (Great Britain: T&T Clark, 2010), 234-236.

the child, the name implies safety for Ahaz and defeat for Rezin and Pekah. In verse 16, Isaiah declares that the two kings which Ahaz and all of Judah fear will retreat from their land; Ahaz will, by implication, not be deposed and replaced by Tabeel.<sup>124</sup>

The single greatest argument that could be used to support the conclusion that the Immanuel oracle in Isaiah 7:10-17 is, in fact, a negative pronouncement for Ahaz, the Davidic line, and the Judean people is the peroration of Isaiah's speech. "YHWH will bring upon you and upon the people and upon the house of your father days which have not come from the day Ephraim turned aside from Judah – the King of Aššur."<sup>125</sup> The possible implications of this verse create trouble for the present hypothesis, that the second oracle in Isaiah 7 signifies the defeat of Aram and Israel. From a cursory reading, it appears that Isaiah is predicting the downfall of Israel. However, an alternative reading may be posed that reframes the final outcome of this oracle. It cannot be assumed that the days experienced by Judah before becoming separated from Ephraim were necessarily unpleasant. It could just as easily refer to the economically prosperous days experienced by the south before the rebellion of the north due to the oppressive rule of Rehoboam. The promise of a return to the days before Ephraim broke away from Judah is a promise of reunification; it is a promise to Ahaz of a unified monarchy over which he would rule. If this view is accepted, the oracle is still negatively colored by the final phrase: "the King of Aššur." Though most commentators agree that the inclusion of the king of Assyria at the end of this verse is definitely negative statement, a prediction that the Assyrian ruler will ultimately create trouble for those living in Judah, they also agree that

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<sup>124</sup> It would appear that Isaiah is predicting Assyria's successful attack on Aram and Israel and, by extension, supporting Ahaz's policy.

<sup>125</sup> Isa 7:17.

the phrase is a clear later addition.<sup>126</sup> If the proposed alternative reading holds true, it is clear how easily a simple addition to the text is able to completely change the meaning of the oracle. A promise of a return to a unified monarchy is reframed to imply destruction for Ahaz, his people, and the house of his father.

When compared to other texts within the Hebrew Bible displaying the condemnation of a king by a prophet, it becomes apparent that the typical method of rejection by is significantly different than the language used by Isaiah in this oracle.<sup>127</sup> In 1 Sam 13:13-14, Samuel condemns Saul for his foolish actions and tells him that YHWH has sought out a new king to replace him. In a doublet, Samuel once again states in 1 Sam 15:25 that YHWH has completely rejected Saul as king of Israel. In 1 Kings 14:10, when Ahijah predicts destruction of the house of Jeroboam for its sins, it is explicitly stated: “[..]I will wipe away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam like one who burns away turds until it is all gone.” A similar scene is found in 1 Kings 22:17 when Micaiah ben-Imlah confronts Ahab. The king is encouraged by Jehoshaphat of Judah to inquire of a prophet of YHWH concerning an impending battle. While Micaiah, seemingly due to frustration, at first lies to the king, he ultimately predicts that after the battle, the people of Israel will wander leaderless like sheep in a field. Later, after revealing that Ahab’s prophets were being controlled by false spirits he makes his ultimate prophecy apparent: *wyhw h dbr ’lyk r ’h*. The view of the king is clearly negative and the prophet makes it explicitly known.

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<sup>126</sup> Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimite*, 133-135; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 156-157; Childs, *Isaiah*, 68. For an alternative view, see Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 297-298. Wildberger suggests the name is withheld for thematic reasons in an effort to strengthen its intensity when it is finally mentioned. See also Mary Katherine Y.H. Hom, *Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 24.

<sup>127</sup> When a prophet predicts the extermination of an entire house, they tend not to veil their predictions or mince words. The condemnation is stated clearly.

Amos makes a similarly straightforward declaration when he states that the house of Jeroboam II will fall, along with all of Israel.<sup>128</sup> Later in the same chapter, it is reiterated that destruction will befall Israel and its residents.<sup>129</sup> Though the second prediction comes in the form of poetry, the message is in no way obfuscated with symbolic imagery. Those living in Israel will surely die by the sword, its land will be divided up and taken by those who slaughter them, and the people will be forced to live out the remainder of their lives in exile far from their homes. Interesting parallels exist with the account of Hosea 1 as well. Just as in the first two oracles presented in Isaiah 7, a child is born whose name signifies a major event to come. The name of the child, Jezreel, supposedly signifies ill-omen for the house of Jehu because he was responsible for the slaughtering of all those connected to the Omride dynasty.<sup>130</sup> Like the previous examples, little is left to the imagination of the reader in terms of deciding what specific person or group is being by the author, the reason for their ensuing punishment, or the nature of the punishment that they are destined to receive.

A common trend can be identified amongst the narratives within the text in which a prophet predicts the complete destruction of a king and his entire line. It seems as though when a prophet desires to foretell negative circumstances regarding a king, they do not mince words in their prophecies. If they are predicting that a king and his line will meet an untimely end, they communicate this in a very clear way without veiling their predictions in allegories and metaphors. The king will be deposed or killed, the line will

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<sup>128</sup> Amos 7:9.

<sup>129</sup> Amos 7:17.

<sup>130</sup> The tone of this pronouncement should be noted due to the stark contrast between the views of Hosea and those presented by the Deuteronomistic Historian in 1 Kings. While Jehu is shown to be the divinely instructed weapon of YHWH responsible for eliminating the line of a religiously objectionable king in the Deuteronomistic account, in the Hosea narrative it is claimed that Jehu will pay for these deeds and his line destroyed.

be wiped away, either not allowed to progress forward or erased from history, and the people will be exiled. None of these situations are explicitly stated in the first two oracles presented by Isaiah to Ahaz. The simple addition at the end of this section, “the king of Assyria,” does not bring the second oracle of Isaiah 7 into league with these other examples. The days that the king of Assyria will bring with him do not have to be seen as negative.

Ultimately, though it may end with a reference to the ruler who would eventually invade Judah under the reign of Hezekiah, the second oracle of Isaiah can be read as a positive prophecy for Ahaz that would ensure the continuation of his line in the face of invasion by the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The assumption that Isaiah’s response to Ahaz is irredeemably damning and that the peroration of the oracle suggests destruction for Judah are based on a negative account of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 and should be avoided. It is indeed highly possible that, though Isaiah responds to Ahaz’s seeming piety with annoyance, the oracle that follows signifies an unsuccessful attack for Aram and Israel and the preservation of Ahaz’s throne. The attribution of the phrase “the King of Aššur” to a later editorialization only serves to strengthen, not make, the hypothesis that Isa 7:10-17 signifies good tidings for Ahaz.

### **Isaiah 7:18-25**

A dramatic shift in tone occurs after the addition at the end of Isa 7:17. “The king of Aššur” in verse 17b is the first explicit reference made to the Assyrians in the text to this point. Though there may be oblique references made earlier in the chapter, it has been shown that the weight of the evidence suggests that the first two oracles appear to



predict the destruction of Israel and Aram rather than Judah. Because of the ambiguity of the previous oracles, there is room for debate as to the subject being discussed at a given time. However, the party responsible for destruction in this continuation is clearly Assyria (and, to an extent, possibly Egypt) as it is named twice. As it will be shown, despite the widely agreed understanding of this oracle as a clear prediction of the destruction of Judah,<sup>131</sup> more favorable alternatives present themselves when the evidence is examined.

Composed of four prophetic images, the refrain *wyhy bywm hhw* ‘ marks the beginning of each new clause. The first likens Egypt to flies,<sup>132</sup> which have a short lifespan and breed mainly in the vicinity of carrion and manure. Responsible for the decomposition of decaying materials, they also pose a major threat to human beings. Though a nuisance in small numbers, certain varieties have the ability harm crops, livestock, and significantly affect human welfare in ways which other types of insects can not.<sup>133</sup> Conversely, the Assyrians are compared to bees.<sup>134</sup> Many scholars highlight to

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<sup>131</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 66-69. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 154-162. Despite an insistence that the previous two oracles are positive signs for Ahaz, Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 234-236, asserts that Judah is the target of destruction in this oracle. As he states that Aram and Israel are the targets of destruction in the first two oracles, this line of reasoning is suspect. Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimitic*, 171-177, suggests that this oracle is aimed at Judah, but only the Judeans who disagree with the policies of Ahaz. Those who favor an appeal to the Assyrians would not be harmed.

<sup>132</sup> Isa 7:18. Edward Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents in the Ancient Near East (Ex. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12; Isa. 7:18-20),” *Orientalia* 49, no.1 (1980), 30-37, suggests the possibility that the word *zbwb*, which is often translated as fly, would more accurately be translated as “hornet” or any other sting member of the order Hymenoptera.

<sup>133</sup> Neufeld, *Insects*, 37, suggests that this text could refer to the gadfly (Tabanidae) or the eye fly (Musca Sorbens) as there is evidence of a prevalence of these particular insect in the Ancient Near East dating to antiquity. It is also suggested that this may be the earliest allusion to tsetse flies in the Ancient Near East. See Frank L. Lambrecht, “Trypanosomiasis in Prehistoric and Later Human Populations, a Tentative Reconstruction,” *Disease in Antiquity*, ed. Don Brothwell and A. T. Sandison (Springfield: Charles Thomas, 1967), 14. The Egyptians suffered a plague of flies at the hand of YHWH in Exodus 8. While this could be a reference of some kind to this event, it would be strange for such a comparison to be made. Though the flies are indeed a destructive force in the plague narrative, in every day life they are a much less devastating power.

<sup>134</sup> Isa 7:18.

the image of wild bees and the danger they pose to humans.<sup>135</sup> The imagery deployed in 7:19 brings to mind an inescapable wave of Assyrian troops flooding the land and stamping out all life that it might encounter.<sup>136</sup> Otto Kaiser states that, because Ahaz and Judah are the objects of derision in the previous oracles, logically this must be a reference to Assyria swarming over Judah and making a ruin of its land.<sup>137</sup>

While bees are, in fact, highly dangerous to humans, they are unlike flies in that when properly handled by a skilled apiary, they can be controlled.<sup>138</sup> A colony of bees can be coerced to provide honey for its owners when cared for and treated properly.<sup>139</sup> They have additionally been used as weaponry during war<sup>140</sup> Though speculative, it is possible that the characterization of insects within the oracle intends to portray Assyria as a dangerous but exploitable force for Ahaz and the Judeans.<sup>141</sup> Regardless, due to the structure of the preceding sections and the proclamations of the approaching failures of Aram and Israel, it is likely that these prophesied swarms are actually intended to fall on Pekah and the people of Israel rather than Judah.

The oracle proceeds with the metaphor for Assyria being changed from that of a swarm of bees to a sharpened razor.<sup>142</sup> Two main points can immediately be gleaned from the metaphorical imagery of this passage. First, though it is Ahaz who is supposedly responsible for the hiring of Assyria as a weapon against Israel and Aram, it

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<sup>135</sup> Hom, *Assyrians*, 25-56. Neufeld, *Insects*, 51.

<sup>136</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 108.

<sup>137</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 108.

<sup>138</sup> Though devastating in specific circumstances, insects that could be classified as flies are typically far too fragile and hostile to be either controlled or transported. Neufeld, *Insects*, 37-42.

<sup>139</sup> Neufeld, *Insects*, 45-52.

<sup>140</sup> For examples of the use of insects as weapons in the Ancient Near East, see Neufeld, *Insects*, 44-46.

<sup>141</sup> If Assyria is seen in this way, a controllable force, this would be an instance of Isaiah supporting Ahaz's pro-Assyrian policies in his own way.

<sup>142</sup> Isa 7:20.

is instead YHWH who is mentioned as having hired them in this instance. While it is possible that this is an instance of Isaiah emphasizing the ultimate power of YHWH, saying that regardless of circumstances it is YHWH who allows the Assyrians to invade, it supports the hypothesis that Isaiah, acting as the mouthpiece of YHWH, is supporting the hiring of Assyria on the part of Ahaz. This could be a perfect illustration of the failure of Rezin and Pekah which Isaiah mentions prior.<sup>143</sup> It is additionally interesting to note that if Isaiah is indeed condemning Ahaz for the hiring of Assyria as a safety valve against the encroaching Syro-Ephraimite coalition, he does not directly denounce the king for the action in this instance.<sup>144</sup> Rather, he outlines the destruction of Aram and Israel at the hands of Assyria; the party hired by Ahaz fulfills the very function for which they were commissioned.<sup>145</sup>

Second, the specific nature of the razor as a weapon must be addressed. Rather than bringing death upon the afflicted, it is instead intended to shave the hair from their heads, beards, and “feet.”<sup>146</sup> Some suggest that, in keeping with the theme in the following verse, this signifies a destruction of the vegetation of the land that would leave the victim destitute and unable to produce crops.<sup>147</sup> While this is a perfectly acceptable explanation, the imagery also provides the reader with a beautiful double entendre.

Comparative evidence from the Hebrew Bible coupled with the usage of the euphemistic

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<sup>143</sup> Isa 7:7-9, 16.

<sup>144</sup> Many perceive an inherent irony in this circumstance in that the very group that Ahaz hires will ultimately bring destruction upon Judah. See Hom, *Assyrians*, 27; John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 216. Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-18* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 298. No such irony can be rightfully identified as the target of Assyria's wrath is in no way explicitly mentioned in this oracle.

<sup>145</sup> A successful invasion by Assyria and the destruction of Aram would align closely with the account of 2 Kgs 16:7-9.

<sup>146</sup> The word in question, *rgl*, is a commonly used idiom in the Hebrew Bible to refer to genitalia rather than actual feet. See Judg 3:24; 1 Sa 24:4; Ruth 3:4,7-8.

<sup>147</sup> John Sawyer, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 86. Hom, *Assyrians*, 26.

“feet” creates a connotation of emasculation for those being shaved with the razor.<sup>148</sup> The forcible shaving of the pubic and facial hair would be understandably shameful for the recipient.

The final section of the oracle concerning the destruction at the hands of Assyria leaves little doubt as to the state of the land when they finally recede. Though there may be enough food to keep the milk of the cows in excess, the possibility of working the land will be completely dashed. The heifers and sheep mentioned in Isa 7:21-22, though they might be well fed,<sup>149</sup> will be turned loose into the wild. Even the most luscious and profitable vineyards will be reduced to thorns and useless shrubs; the vines will be completely absent of grapes.<sup>150</sup> In the places where animals were hunted for profit and self-sustainment, there will be nothing but the same thorns and briers.<sup>151</sup> Even tilling the soil will be rendered impossible as the Assyrians will have left nothing but destruction in their wake from the attack. The glimmer of hope proposed by the previous verses is all but snuffed out by this explicit description of the sheer devastation imparted on the land by the attackers.<sup>152</sup> The ground will be unsuitable for living on the part of man; it will be left a ravaged land unfit for even meager settlement.

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<sup>148</sup> 2 Samuel 10 illustrates just such a narrative. David’s men, sent as emissaries on behalf of the king to grieve for the father of the newly crowned Ammonite ruler, are sent back to Jerusalem with half of their beards shaved and their clothing cut in such a way that their bottoms are exposed. The text insists that they are greatly humiliated and David allows them the opportunity to remain away from home until they are able to regrow their beards. This is offensive enough to David that he ultimately enters battle with the Ammonites and defeats them.

<sup>149</sup> In order to produce milk in excess quantities a cow must be well-fed. A strange, if not contradictory allusion is made here as it suggests that the vegetation of the land is not completely decimated. Additionally, this use of curds and honey, rather than the more widely attested usage of milk and honey, is employed previously in Isaiah 7 in reference to the diet of the child Immanuel.

<sup>150</sup> Isa 7:23.

<sup>151</sup> Isa 7:24.

<sup>152</sup> Isa 7:23-25.

It is absolutely clear that this oracle is meant to signify impending doom and instill dread in the mind of whomever it refers. It has been widely assumed that this third oracle must refer to Judah because, like the previous two oracles, scholars tend to privilege the Deuteronomistic account of Ahaz rather than the information before them in Isaiah 7. This methodology creates a problem in that it skews views of this particular text and creates a false image of the king being spoken to by the prophet. As it has been shown above, that the first two oracles clearly denounce the actions of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance with clear emphasis placed on Aram and Israel as the main culprits. It is Israel that is derided for its politically minded attempt to expand its territory and depose the southern king.<sup>153</sup> It is Israel that is guilty of religious missteps for its entire existence as a nation.<sup>154</sup> It is Aram and Israel that are explicitly criticized in the first two oracles in the chapter.<sup>155</sup> It is therefore evident that the final culmination of these oracles, the detailed description of the destruction of the land and the deep shaming of the people, should most likely be understood to apply to none other than Aram and Israel. To assume that this oracle refers to Judah simply because of the appeal to the Assyrians on the part of Ahaz is to assume too much.

### **Conclusion**

When the oracles of Isaiah 7 are divided and addressed in terms of their relation to Ahaz, Assyria, and the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, the results of the study are quite clear. Through a close reading of the text, it has been shown that the majority of scholars

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<sup>153</sup> Isa 7:1,6.

<sup>154</sup> 2 Chr 13:15-16, 15:3, 18:16, 28:13.

<sup>155</sup> Isa 7:4,7, 9, 16, 18-25.

commenting on this text have been led astray by reading the first two oracles of Isaiah 7 through the lens of the Deuteronomistic account of Ahaz which predisposes them to assume a negative meaning for Isaiah's address to this, in their mind, clearly corrupt king.<sup>156</sup> They then proceed by interpreting the destruction posed in the third oracle as a representation of the future of Judah. This is only possible, though, because of their reading of the first two oracles. These oracles must instead be taken at face value and attention must be paid to the actual words of Isaiah rather than the predetermined image a reader might have in their mind of Ahaz.

While there is copious evidence that Isaiah mainly concerns himself with the condemnation of the actions of Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, it is still possible that the text of Isaiah also condemns Ahaz and Judah through the use of allegory and highly veiled, non-specific imagery. Indeed, this is the interpretation of the majority of scholarship.<sup>157</sup> However, it is necessary to make note of a certain lack of similarities between Isaiah 7 and 2 Kings 16. It has been previously suggested that a Josianic redactor would have an excellent motive, Ahaz's association with Assyria, to edit the account of Ahaz and insert negative material into the regnal evaluation. This would mean that that the only crime with which the later redactor took offense would be the Assyrian appeal and that the remainder of the material concerning the reign of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 can be interpreted in a positive light. The implications of that assessment carry a direct correlation to the assessment of Ahaz in Isaiah 7. At no point does Isaiah ever

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<sup>156</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 235-236. Childs, *Isaiah*, 62-69. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 159-163. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 63-68. Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 216. Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 298.

<sup>157</sup> Though there is no explicit condemnation of Ahaz or Judah in this chapter, the majority of scholars assert that Isa 7:10-17 is a condemnation of Ahaz and that Isa 7:18-25 is an outline of the destruction of Judah.

mention a single cultic misgiving on the part of the king. The child sacrifice conducted by Ahaz,<sup>158</sup> an event which can be argued is negatively framed in the Deuteronomistic material, is never mentioned by the prophet.

The altar that Ahaz commissions,<sup>159</sup> though it would narratively come later in the account due to the fact that it was supposedly not constructed until after Assyria's destruction of Israel and Aram, is never criticized by the prophet. Isaiah even refers to Uriah the priest, the person responsible for the construction of Ahaz's Aramean altar,<sup>160</sup> as a witness to a prophecy from YHWH.<sup>161</sup> Even if one reads Isaiah 7 as a completely negative assessment of Ahaz that thoroughly rejects his decisions as king and derides him for his decision to appeal to Assyria, the hypothesis that Ahaz was originally framed in a more positive light in 2 Kings 16 prior to editorializations on the part of a Josianic redactor stands firm. In other words, the only possible transgression of Ahaz in this narrative, though the weight of the evidence lies more heavily on a lack of criticism, is his association with Assyria: the very crime linked with Ahaz on the part of the Josianic Deuteronomist earlier in this study.

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<sup>158</sup> 2 Kgs 16:3.

<sup>159</sup> 2 Kgs 16:10-16.

<sup>160</sup> 2 Kgs 16:10-16.

<sup>161</sup> Isa 8:2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CHRONICLER'S PORTRAYAL OF AHAZ

The third and final text within the biblical corpus to recount the rule of Ahaz is 2 Chronicles 28. Just as with the annalistic accounts recorded in Kings, the manner in which various rulers are portrayed in Chronicles are heavily influenced by the views of the book's compiler, the Chronicler. Although the report of Ahaz's reign in 2 Chronicles 28 is similar to the account in 2 Kings 16, there are nevertheless some dramatic differences between the two. It has been proposed previously in this study that when Ahaz's reign as reported in 2 Kings 16 is viewed independently from his regnal evaluation, the report of his actions is, at worst, ambivalent. A similar approach was taken with Isaiah 7.

Taking this chapter at face value rather than reading it alongside 2 Kings 16 reveals a mostly positive portrayal of Ahaz. Chronicles, on the other hand, seemingly provides no room for an alternative interpretation of Ahaz in its roundly dismissive and negative account of his reign. There is no way to interpret the words of the Chronicler as anything other than decidedly negative when it discusses the actions of the king. The book goes so far, in fact, as to portray him in a decidedly more negative light than the account given in 2 Kings 16. In fact, due to the Chronicler's reworking of Manasseh's reign, it becomes apparent that Ahaz is, for the Chronicler, the most grievously offensive king in Judean history.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> 2 Chr 33:1-20.



The goal of this chapter is to explore the different ways in which the author of Chronicles used his *Vorlage*, presumably something resembling our book of Kings,<sup>163</sup> and argue that 2 Chronicles 28 is an interpretation of that material that further vilifies Ahaz. In other words, the Chronicler seems to be operating under the supposition that all material following the initial evaluation of Ahaz is inherently negative.<sup>164</sup> Although the Chronicler includes more details concerning the rule of Ahaz, more often than not his depictions of the cultic misdeeds of this king are details derived from Deuteronomistic material as the result of the Chronicler taking these events to their logical ends on the basis of his assumptions. Though there is also material from outside sources included in the Chronicler's account,<sup>165</sup> the negative content describing Ahaz present in 2 Chronicles 28 seems, in its entirety, to be taken from Kings, either directly or through interpretation.

### **Material Directly Cited From Kings**

The Chronicler begins his account of the reign of Ahaz by borrowing directly from the Deuteronomistic material. Excluding 2 Kgs 16:1, presumably because it includes a synchronism with king Pekah of Israel,<sup>166</sup> the Chronicler adapts the historical

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<sup>163</sup> Steven L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler's use of the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1984) 26-28. Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 14-23. Anson F. Rainey. "The Chronicler and his Sources – Historical and Geographical," in *The Chronicler as Historian*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 31-43. H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 21-24. For an alternative view, see A. Graham Auld, "What was the Main Source of the Book of Chronicles?" in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture*, ed. M. Patrick Graham (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 91-99.

<sup>164</sup> Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 393. McKenzie, *1-2 Chronicles*, 35.

<sup>165</sup> In addition to Kings, it is also apparent that the Chronicler had access to a version of Isaiah.

<sup>166</sup> The Chronicler views the northern kingdom as an illegitimate institution and thus excludes discussion of it and its ruler unless they are laterally related to Judah. See H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Baruch Halpern "Why Manasseh is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile," *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 4 (October 1998): 1.

prologue provided by Kings for his own work.<sup>167</sup> This is not atypical, as the usage of the regnal prologue from Kings occurs multiple times throughout the book. With the exception of the addition of a small clause in verse 2 (*wgm mskwt šh lb 'lym*)<sup>168</sup> the introductory wording used for the two texts is nearly identical. That the Chronicler used and expanded upon the historical prologue from Kings already demonstrates his willingness to change his source material. In this case, he has added a charge to those found in Kings, which never accuses Ahaz of worshipping other gods. This shows that the Chronicler is interested in reframing the actions of Ahaz in an explicitly negative light. For the Chronicler, because the Kings incipit is negative, the following material must also, by definition, be negative. Even though it has been demonstrated previously in chapter one of this study that many of the actions in the Kings account of Ahaz are not necessarily intended to be negative in character once the incipit has been set aside and, more often than not, appear to be portrayed in an ambivalent or even positive light, it appears that the Chronicler allows this Deuteronomistic evaluation of Ahaz to color the remainder of the information in the text. This use of 2 Kgs 16:2-4, adapting it to portray Ahaz in a harsher manner, fits the pattern for the rest of the Chronicler's adaptation of 2 Kings 16.

In a similar fashion, the Chronicler's account of Ahaz concludes with an adaptation of the report found in Kings. The remainder of the events of the life of the king are said to reside in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel and the burial location is described.<sup>169</sup> The burial of Ahaz differs from the *Vorlage* in 2 Kings 16 by inexplicably

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<sup>167</sup> 2 Kgs 16:2-4. 2 Chr 28:1-4. Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 395-396.

<sup>168</sup> The possible significance of this addition will be explored below.

<sup>169</sup> 2 Chr 28:26-27. The name of the book holding the various actions of the kings occasionally changes from account to account. 2 Chr 20:34 instead says "the book of the kings of Israel" despite Jehoshaphat's

adding the note that he was not brought to the tombs of the Kings of Israel, the only occurrence of such a conflation in a burial account for the Chronicler. If we presume that the Chronicler means Judah when he says Israel here, as seems clear in other verses in this account,<sup>170</sup> then the Ahaz account ends with the same goal with which it began: to portray Ahaz as an objectionable, irredeemably terrible king. Special effort is made to show that Ahaz was buried not with the other kings, but is rather deprived of the final honor that could be bestowed upon a ruler.<sup>171</sup> Despite the Chronicler's general dependence on Kings, the only material shared between Kings and Chronicles for Ahaz are the historical prologue and the death and burial discussed here.<sup>172</sup> It is therefore necessary to examine the texts which are omitted by the Chronicler, as this material is worth as much exploration as the material which he includes.

### **Material From Kings Omitted by the Chronicler**

For the Chronicler omission from the Deuteronomistic material is equally as prevalent as citation. However, though he omits material from Kings in his own narrative, it does not necessarily suggest that the material was ignored outright. As the Chronicler is a competent historian, it must be inferred that the decision to exclude material from a source was not made without reason and must have been the result of a logical

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status as a Judean king, as does the account of Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:18. The accounts of Jotham (2 Chr 27:7), Josiah (2 Chr 35:20), and Jehoiakim (2 Chr 36:8) all use "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah." Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 406-407.

<sup>170</sup> Ahaz is described as the King of Israel earlier in the narrative in 2 Chr 28:19. For a discussion on the significance of this usage, see: Williamson, *Israel*, 118; Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 403.

<sup>171</sup> Japhet, *Chronicles*, 909, notes that the Chronicler views burial as a theologically meaningful event representative of the effectiveness of the ruler and their devotion to YHWH. Japhet asserts that for Ahaz to be buried with the other kings would be unthinkable in the mind of the Chronicler. Due to his terrible standing, he would naturally have to be buried removed from a place of honor. This would explain the differentiation from the burial account in Kings.

<sup>172</sup> 2 Kgs 16:2-4; 2 Chr 28:1-4; 2 Kgs 16:19-20; 2 Chr 28:26-27.

progression of thought. While several pieces of seemingly key information from 2 Kings 16 seem to have been omitted from the account of the Chronicler, these omissions seem to have been made in an effort to maintain the carefully crafted reinterpretation of the historian. These exclusions, when considered in relation to the reinterpreted material, were critical to the larger account and were, by necessity, made in order to maintain a rational progression of events.

The destruction of Aram and the death of Rezin, described in 2 Kgs 16:9 are omitted from 2 Chronicles 28 entirely, as is Ahaz's journey to Aram in 2 Kgs 16:10-11. Due to the Chronicler's portrayal of Aram's invasion of Judah, a complete defeat for Ahaz and an untold number of people being taken into exile,<sup>173</sup> there would be no logical way for the Chronicler to include such a report in the larger narrative. This would require Ahaz to be victorious in a battle against an encroaching enemy, a characterization that, as will be shown below, operates counter to the purpose of the historian. Because of the omission of the journey to Aram to greet the king of Assyria, there is subsequently neither an account of the large altar commissioned by Ahaz nor of Uriah,<sup>174</sup> the priest charged with the construction of said altar.<sup>175</sup> This is yet another example of the historian excluding material in order to maintain narrative continuity. There are several small components of 2 Kings 16 which appear to have no parallel with 2 Chronicles 28. However, though much of this material appears to be completely omitted,<sup>176</sup> it can be

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<sup>173</sup> 2 Chr 28:5.

<sup>174</sup> Uriah is mentioned in both 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 8. In 2 Kings 16, the priest raises no objection to the request of Ahaz to oversee the building of a new (foreign) altar in the temple courtyard and in Isaiah 8 he is described as a reliable witness to the prophet.

<sup>175</sup> Though it seems that the Aramean altar is completely omitted, it will be argued in the next section that the altar was reinterpreted for the purposes of the Chronicler.

<sup>176</sup> McKenzie, *Chronicler's Use*, 113, suggests that the Chronicler tends to omit material that lies outside his area of interest or, in some cases, directly conflicts with it.

suggested that a majority of the Chronicler's account of Ahaz is actually a reinterpretation of 2 Kings 16.

### **Material Reinterpreted by the Chronicler**

For the Chronicler, there is a fine line between omission and reinterpretation of his source material. Though it may seem that the Chronicler ignores strands of the narrative in 2 Kings 16 in lieu of outside material in order to construct his historical account, upon further examination it may be demonstrated that much of the material within 2 Kings 16 is actually present in 2 Chronicles 28, albeit in an altered form.

Through a close reading of the text, it becomes apparent that the Chronicler, possibly in an effort to explicate the true nature of his source material while operating under the assumption that the actions of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 are definitionally reprehensible, attempted to reframe the events of his reign in a more negative light.

The Chronicler portrays the Syro-Ephraimite war differently than the accounts contained in Kings and Isaiah.<sup>177</sup> Because the attack of Rezin and Pekah from the north is the main event of Ahaz's reign around which all of the narratives revolve, this is no small matter. The Kings material portrays Ahaz appealing to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III for help, the destruction of Israel and Aram at the hands of the Assyrian troops, and a meeting between Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in Damascus.<sup>178</sup> The Isaiah narrative contains

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<sup>177</sup> 2 Kgs 16:5-9; Isa 7:2; 2 Chr 28:5-15. It should additionally be noted that while Aram and Israel are said to be in an alliance of some kind in both 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7, no such claim is made in 2 Chronicles 28. Though Judah is mentioned as suffering subsequent defeat at the hands of Rezin and Pekah, no explicit connection is made between the two countries. For detailed discussion on the historicity of the Syro-Ephraimite war, see Michael E.W. Thompson, *Situation and Theology: Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephraimite War* (Prophets and Historians Series 1; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982).

<sup>178</sup> 2 Kgs 16:7-10.

oracles referring to the incoming destruction of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition.<sup>179</sup> It states that the land of the attacking countries will become utterly destitute due to the “Assyrian Razor” wielded at the hands of YHWH.<sup>180</sup> The sources available to the Chronicler that are known to us portray, whether directly or through prediction, the defeat of Aram and Israel during the reign of Ahaz.<sup>181</sup> In direct opposition to these prior accounts, the Chronicler gives a detailed account of Judah’s crushing defeat at the hands of Aram and Israel.<sup>182</sup> In addition to these losses on the battlefield for Judah, both attacking nations are said to have captured prisoners numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

It is strange that the Chronicler’s account would differ so strongly from the source from which he derives information because of the dramatic implications those changes would imply for the future of Judah. One reason for this deviation could be that the Chronicler views victory in battle as a sign of divine favor.<sup>183</sup> Only when a king acts appropriately does he receive approval from YHWH in times of war.<sup>184</sup> Conversely, when a ruler becomes distasteful in the eyes of YHWH, divine assistance is removed.<sup>185</sup> The Ahaz narrative thus fits quite conveniently with the overarching war theology of the

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<sup>179</sup> Isa 7:2-17. As it will be discussed below, Isaiah 14 also alludes to a Judean victory against Philistia at the hands of Ahaz.

<sup>180</sup> Isa 7:18-25.

<sup>181</sup> Josephus’s account of the reign of Ahaz (Ant. IX.243-257), while obviously composed long after the work of the Chronicler, also portrays a defeat of Judah at the hands of the encroaching Syro-Ephraimite coalition. This comes after Judah resists a siege due to the strength of the walls surrounding Jerusalem. While this is interesting, it is quite apparent that Josephus leans quite heavily on the Chronicles account for his work in this instance, if not exclusively. It may be that Josephus, reading both the victory of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 and the crushing defeat of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28 attempted to reconcile the two accounts by having Ahaz initially resist the attack and subsequently fail upon giving chase to his retreating foes. Josephus, *Antiquities IX*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 131-137.

<sup>182</sup> 2 Chr 28:5-8.

<sup>183</sup> McKenzie, *1-2 Chronicles*, 338-339. Irvine, *Syro-Ephraimite*, 93-94. Williamson, *Israel*, 116. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 899-900.

<sup>184</sup> In 2 Chr 14:11-12, Asa is rewarded by YHWH for his praise with a victory over the Cushites. 2 Chronicles 20 portrays Jehoshaphat receiving divine assistance due to his piety.

<sup>185</sup> 2 Chr 12:1-12. 2 Chr 21:8-17.

Chronicler. For the Chronicler, because Ahaz is culturally distasteful, it would be paradoxical for him to achieve any sort of victory in battle because YHWH would, by necessity, remove his protection from both he and Judah. The loss described is so devastating that Ahaz loses not only two high ranking officials, but his son as well.<sup>186</sup>

After a digression dealing with the fate of the Judean captives in Israel,<sup>187</sup> the Chronicler resumes his discussion of Ahaz by recounting further defeats at the hands of other nations.<sup>188</sup> The motive of the historian becomes an issue here as the events of the Syro-Ephraimite war appear dramatically different than what appears in either the Deuteronomistic material or Isaiah. 2 Kings 16 narrates Ahaz's appeal to the king of Assyria after successfully repelling Aram and Israel in an effort to quell any further attacks and mitigate losses; in doing so he appears to save his country.<sup>189</sup> Isaiah 7 contains neither an actual battle nor the appeal to Assyria, but makes predictions about the outcomes of each: the preservation of Judah and the destruction of Aram and Israel.<sup>190</sup> Instead, the Chronicler appears to have him requesting help specifically because he was ravaged by Aram and Israel;<sup>191</sup> Kings' assertion that they were unsuccessful<sup>192</sup> and Isaiah's promise that they would not succeed<sup>193</sup> seem to have made no impact on the Chronicler's account.

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<sup>186</sup> 2 Chr 28:7-8.

<sup>187</sup> Discussed below.

<sup>188</sup> 2 Chr 28:16.

<sup>189</sup> 2 Kgs 16:7-9.

<sup>190</sup> Isa 7:2-9;10-17;18-24.

<sup>191</sup> It is not uncommon for the Chronicler to dramatically alter the timeline of the inherited text in kings with either alternative source material or his own words in order to fit his theological positions. The account of the relationship between Asa of Judah and Baasha of Israel in 1 Kgs 15:16-22 is dramatically different than that found in 2 Chr 16:1-10.

<sup>192</sup> 2 Kgs 16:5.

<sup>193</sup> Isa 7:4-9.

The logic of 28:16-21 appears troublingly convoluted and creates significant problems for those attempting to reconstruct the Chronicler's intent behind recording these events in such a way. This section appears to be divisible into three distinct narrative units: v. 16, 17-19, 20-21. Ahaz's initial appeal to Assyria is framed so as to connote that it occurred concurrently with the release of the Judean prisoners.<sup>194</sup> Additionally, this request for help excludes the pledge made by Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:7 to serve at the leisure of the Assyrian king<sup>195</sup> and his offer of a bribe. The narrative then shifts from the request for assistance to attacks by Edom and Philistia.<sup>196</sup> Just as they were vanquished by the Arameans and Israelites, Judah is described as being defeated by this onslaught as well. Edom takes captives and, unlike Israel, is not shown returning them.<sup>197</sup> Philistia annexes several Judean cities.<sup>198</sup> Focusing again on portraying Ahaz as a ruler incapable of protecting his territory and facing constant subjugation from attackers, Judah is described as suffering defeat at every turn. The Chronicler's reason for these losses: the transgressions of Ahaz against YHWH.<sup>199</sup> Interestingly, this is the first occurrence of the Chronicler explicitly denouncing Ahaz without a clear parallel in Deuteronomistic material. It is true that he seemingly included and slightly reworked the historical prologue from 2 Kings 16 because it portrayed Ahaz in a negative light.

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<sup>194</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 904-905. Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 402.

<sup>195</sup> This is quite strange as this would be a perfect opportunity for the Chronicler to frame Ahaz as a particularly idolatrous ruler.

<sup>196</sup> 2 Chr 28:17-18.

<sup>197</sup> 2 Chr 28:17.

<sup>198</sup> 2 Chr 28:18. This victory on the part of Philistia appear to directly contradict Isaiah 14. In Isaiah's oracle against the Philistines, he prophesies in the year of the death of Ahaz. He appears to allude to Ahaz as the rod which struck the Philistines. He tells Philistia not to rejoice because, contextually, Ahaz either defeated them in battle or restricted them from entering Judean territory. It cannot be argued that the Chronicler did not have some version of the book of Isaiah, as he references it in the account of the death of Hezekiah (2 Chr 32:32).

<sup>199</sup> 2 Chr 28:19.



However, it is not until v. 19 that the historian uses either non-Deuteronomistic sources or his own personal viewpoint to describe the faults of Ahaz.

The narrative shifts once again in 2 Chr 28:20 back to the discussion of Assyria and the distressed appeal of Ahaz. As in the Deuteronomistic account, Tiglath-Pileser III<sup>200</sup> travels to Judah.<sup>201</sup> Unlike in the Deuteronomistic material, it is not made clear whether the Assyrian king travelled west in response to the request of Ahaz or of his own accord. Drawing even further afield from the account in 2 Kings 16, the king of Assyria is shown not to assist Ahaz in his time of need and instead added to his troubles.<sup>202</sup> This would imply a fifth nation in the single account of 2 Chronicles 28 pressing down upon Ahaz and threatening Judah with destruction. In a clear reference to 2 Kgs 16:8, Ahaz is described as taking riches from the palace and having them delivered to the Assyrian king in an effort to placate him.<sup>203</sup> Chronologically, this differs slightly from the Deuteronomistic material. If 2 Kgs 16:8 is viewed in the larger context of the chapter, the riches of the palace are sent with the initial group of messengers as a *šḥd* for Tiglath-Pileser III.<sup>204</sup> In Chronicles, this monetary appeal seems to follow an initial rejection of help from Assyria and appears to be made in an effort to sway the Assyrian king.<sup>205</sup> Rather than accepting these gifts as tribute and helping Judah, the involvement of Assyria ends abruptly and no help is given. This is an instance of the Chronicler taking his source material that describes the reign of Ahaz in an ambivalent way and reframes it so that it

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<sup>200</sup> The name of the Assyrian king appears to be misspelled in this text: *Tilgath-Pilneser*.

<sup>201</sup> 2 Chr 28:20.

<sup>202</sup> 2 Chr 28:20. The most common translation of *šwr* (*qal*) in this context, “he distressed him,” is less than satisfactory. “Besiege” is the much more appropriate usage, both in terms of context and frequency of usage.

<sup>203</sup> 2 Chr 28:21.

<sup>204</sup> 2 Chr 28:20-21.

<sup>205</sup> The initial appeal in v. 16 is rejected in v. 20. For this section to maintain continuity, it can only be that the Chronicler refers to a second appeal after an initial rejection.

appears clearly negative. In the Deuteronomistic material, Ahaz appears to be making a shrewd diplomatic treaty in order to eliminate an immediate threat. Assyria seems to be hired in the same fashion as a mercenary in order to eliminate Aram and Israel.<sup>206</sup>

Alternatively, in Chronicles, Ahaz only attempts to placate the Assyrian king when his back is pressed firmly against the proverbial wall.<sup>207</sup> He appeals to Assyria, it fails, and when no other option is left, the Chronicler portrays him dividing the house of YHWH.<sup>208</sup>

Following the end of the Assyrian report, all accounts of wars against Judah under the reign of Ahaz cease. While the narratives must naturally come to an end in order to segue into new material, the Chronicler creates a significant paradox for his readers.

Throughout the discussions of the five individual groups that attack Judah, there is no resolution given to any single conflict, save possibly Israel.<sup>209</sup> Unlike in 2 Kings 16:7-9, Aram faces no destruction at the hands of the Assyrians and the fate of Rezin is left completely unanswered; they simply drop out of the narrative. The attack by Edom, which parallels the events of 2 Kgs 16:6, is not said to proceed after the initial taking of captives.<sup>210</sup> Though both of these events occur in both 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28,

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<sup>206</sup> 2 Kgs 16:8-9.

<sup>207</sup> 2 Chr 28:16,18.

<sup>208</sup> 2 Kgs 16:8 describes Ahaz as “taking” from the house of YHWH and the house of the king (*lqh qal*), 2 Chr 28:21 instead describes Ahaz as “dividing” the house of YHWH and the house of the King (*hlq qal*). While this distinction is deserving of in-depth analysis, the direct outcome of this discussion does not apply to the results of this study. It is only important to note the clear connection drawn between 2 Kgs 16:8 and 2 Chr 28:21. The Chronicler is once again shown reframing his source material in such a way that intensifies any possible negative connotations for Ahaz.

<sup>209</sup> It is possible that the entire narrative of Oded and the Israelite soldiers was placed within the larger Ahaz account in order to signify an end to the conflict between Israel and Judah.

<sup>210</sup> 2 Chr 28:17. The Chroniclers account of Edom’s attack differs from the attack in the Deuteronomistic material. Though 2 Kings 16:6 MT describes a victory of Rezin and Aram at Elat, many scholars believe that the text actually reads rather Edom (*’dm*) than Aram (*’rm*); the obvious explanation would be confusion between the *d/r* consonants. This would make significantly more logical sense as, strategically, Edom would be much more geographically advantaged in the capture defense of Elat. Situated on the northernmost point of the Gulf of Aqaba, Elat would be a long distance from Aram and the idea of the influence of Rezin extending that far south is doubtful. Under this hypothesis, the name Rezin in 2 Kgs 16:6 would be a later insertion to bolster the claim of Aram’s victory. If it is indeed Edom in this instance

they are framed dramatically differently. The conflict with Philistia, which ends abruptly as well,<sup>211</sup> is written in stark contrast with the alternative narrative peripherally alluded to in Isa 14:28-32. Finally, the Chronicler's work describes no final outcome, positive or negative, to Ahaz's interactions with Assyria. Contextually, it appears that Assyria has descended onto Judah and threatens them with war, yet the account comes to a brusque end without resolving the numerous issues facing Ahaz.<sup>212</sup> This lack of resolution creates a startlingly obvious hiccup in the overall narrative of the Ahaz account that has been noted by few.<sup>213</sup>

Following (or simultaneous with) the siege of Jerusalem by the king of Assyria, the Chronicler portrays Ahaz delving deeper into his transgressions against YHWH.<sup>214</sup> While beginning as an ambiguous statement, he soon expounds upon the actions of Ahaz that are deemed reprehensible.<sup>215</sup> All of these transgressions appear to be expansions of the Deuteronomistic material which the Chronicler clearly uses as a source. When Ahaz

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and not Aram, it is notable that in the Chronicler's narrative, Edom is said to carry away captives. See Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 402.

<sup>211</sup> It is noteworthy that, among the attackers, Philistia is the only one described as taking land from Judah instead of taking captives. This becomes even more paradoxical when the change of Edom's account from 2 Kings 16 to 2 Chronicles 28 is taken into account. Nadav Na'aman, "In Search of Reality behind the Account of the Philistine Assault on Ahaz in the Book of Chronicles," *Transeuphratene* 26 (2003) 47-63, suggests that the Chronicler is applying a retributive doctrine by having Philistia reclaim land that was taken by Ahaz's grandfather, Uzziah. Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 402, infers that this destruction is referenced in Isaiah 9:8-12. However, when this text is read, it is explicit that the prophet refers to Israel here and not(!) Judah.

<sup>212</sup> This is strangely uncharacteristic for the Chronicler, as the final outcome of battles are usually described (2 Chr 12:1-12, 14:9-13, 20:1-30, 21:8-17). Assyria is described as besieging Judah (*šwr qal*) in 2 Chronicles 28:20. Though it is usually translated as something to the effect of "distressing [him]," the word is more often translated as "besiege" (see 2 Kgs 16:5). If this is the case, then the Chronicler is portraying Assyria at the doorstep of Judah threatening to attack. This intensifies the lack of resolution created by the historian. To offer no resolution to the possibility of Assyria laying siege to Judah is paradoxical to say the least.

<sup>213</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 907.

<sup>214</sup> 2 Chr 28:22.

<sup>215</sup> Notable at the end of 2 Chr 28:22 is the reiteration of the name of Ahaz. While it is possible that this is merely a stylistic flourish, it seems strange to restate the name of the subject when no other possible figure could be confused with the king. There is no figure in this section (not to mention the entire chapter) who faces such distress as Ahaz. The need to repeat the name appears quite redundant.

is facing his most dire straits, he begins to worship Damascene gods due to the role they played in Aram's victory over Judah.<sup>216</sup> It appears that this is the Chronicler's reinterpretation of 2 Kgs 16:7-9; because Assyria never accepted the tribute of Ahaz and destroyed Aram in the narrative of the Chronicler, this repurposes the Deuteronomistic material in a more explicitly negative fashion.<sup>217</sup> For the Chronicler, this is a clear opportunity to make sense of a paradox within his source. If he is operating under the assumption that all of the listed actions of Ahaz must be negative, this is a logical line of reasoning. Ahaz could not possibly decree the building of an altar simply due to aesthetic preference or a desire to replace the altar in the temple with a larger one. The altar would have to be built because Ahaz desires to worship foreign gods. This action is labelled to be so egregious that it is deemed the direct result of the downfall of Judah.<sup>218</sup>

In 2 Chr 28:4, the Chronicler once again draws from the material in 2 Kings 16 in an effort to reframe the Deuteronomistic account of Ahaz more negatively. The events of 2 Kings 16:17 and 16:18 (respectively) are condensed down and recomposed in such a way as to fit the overall narrative of cultic abhorrence on the part of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28.<sup>219</sup> The specificity of the stripping of the bronze oxen and covered entryway are described simply as a "cutting to pieces" of the furnishings of the temple.<sup>220</sup> The closing of the personal entryway of the king in the temple is described as closing *all* of the doors

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<sup>216</sup> 2 Chr 28:23.

<sup>217</sup> Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 405 posits that this is an interpretation of the Deuteronomistic material by the Chronicler as well.

<sup>218</sup> 2 Chr 28:23. As it has been previously noted, the Chronicler does not resolve the Assyrian conflict, positively or negatively. No complete destruction of Judah is described during the reign of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28. The exact downfall to which the Chronicler refers becomes increasingly difficult to discern as the text goes on as no ultimate destruction is ever described despite the copious amount of time dedicated to the losses suffered by Ahaz prior to his religious misgivings. It is also possible that this conflation occurs once again in 2 Chr 28:24, as will be discussed below.

<sup>219</sup> 2 Chr 28:24.

<sup>220</sup> 2 Kgs 16:17. 2 Chr 28:24.

of the temple.<sup>221</sup> The actions of Ahaz that are framed ambiguously by the Deuteronomistic material and outright ignored by Isaiah are intensified by the Chronicler. Strangely, the Chronicler omits the construction of the main altar and decides instead to suggest that Ahaz built altars *bkl-pnh byrwšm* (“in every corner of Jerusalem”). If the Chronicler’s goal is to deride the actions of Ahaz as religiously untenable, it seems as though focusing on a foreign altar placed in the center of the courtyard of the temple would be a particularly sharp arrow in his quiver.

There is only one problem with this: though the Chronicler may feel at liberty to stretch and intensify the actions of Ahaz in order to make his regnal account appear more negative, neither Hezekiah nor Josiah are listed as having destroyed this large altar in the center of the courtyard in Kings.<sup>222</sup> This is detrimental for the overall narrative the Chronicler is attempting to craft. The remainder of Ahaz’s actions can easily be reframed in such a way so as to appear clearly negative. However, a large foreign altar in the center of the courtyard which Ahaz is described as having used regularly<sup>223</sup> is not said to have been destroyed by Hezekiah or Josiah, two decidedly iconoclastic kings.<sup>224</sup> The only way to remedy this: obfuscate the building of this altar by associating it with the building of altars throughout Jerusalem.<sup>225</sup> In this way, the Chronicler both remains true to his source material while reworking it in such a way it removes any positive context. Instead of building a grand altar in the center of the courtyard which Hezekiah and Josiah do not destroy, no altar is built and, therefore, there is nothing to be destroyed. Instead of

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<sup>221</sup> 2 Kgs 16:18. 2 Chr 28:24.

<sup>222</sup> 2 Kgs 16:19-20. 2 Kgs 18:1-20:21. 2 Kgs 22:1-23:20.

<sup>223</sup> 2 Kgs 16:15.

<sup>224</sup> For Ahaz’s usage of the altar, see 2 Kgs 16:15.

<sup>225</sup> 2 Chr 28:24.

sacrificing at the altar in the morning and in the evening,<sup>226</sup> the doors to the temple were completely closed and the building fell into disuse.<sup>227</sup> When Hezekiah reopens the doors and cleanses the temple in 2 Chr 29:3-19, he does not destroy the altar in the center of the courtyard; there is no altar to be destroyed, no monolithic platform to be torn down.<sup>228</sup>

The final accusation leveled against Ahaz comes in 2 Chr 28:25: *wbkl 'yr w'yr lyhwdh 'sh bmwt lqtr l'lw hm 'hrym wk's 't yhw h 'lwhy 'bwt yw* (“And in every city and city of Judah, he made *bamôt* to sacrifice to other gods and caused YHWH, the god of his father, to be angry”). This appears to be a further reinterpretation of the building of the Aramean altar in 2 Kgs 16:10-17. While removing the action that could possibly linked to a positive change in the worship within the temple, the Chronicler was able to retain the negative implications of the action being linked to foreign worship. To put it more plainly, the Chronicler removed the altar narrative from his discussion because it would create problems for the overall negative narrative levelled against Ahaz; however, any possible damaging implications that could be gleaned were kept in the new narrative. In order to add voracity to this accusation, the Chronicler added a clause in the historical prologue taken from 2 Kings 16:2-4.<sup>229</sup> In 2 Chr 28:4, the historian claims that Ahaz created *massekah* for the Ba'alîm. This description of foreign worship in the regnal evaluation directly connects with the foreign worship perpetrated later in 2 Chr 28:5.

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<sup>226</sup> 2 Kgs 16:15.

<sup>227</sup> 2 Chr 28:24.

<sup>228</sup> 2 Chr 29:18-19 details the sanctification (*qds* piel) and the cleansing (*thr* piel) of the temple. While Hezekiah does indeed cleanse the altar along with other objectionable pieces of ephemera, this altar has no specific connection to Ahaz in the narrative of the Chronicler. It appears to be the altar which has always stood in the courtyard.

<sup>229</sup> Williamson, *Chronicles commentary*, 344 also notes the intentional connection between the addition in the prologue and the recurrence of the charge later in the chapter.

Ahaz, in the final throes of his kingship, submits to foreign gods and stokes the fires of YHWH's anger.<sup>230</sup>

Though, as this study has posed, the Chronicler tends more often to reinterpret the material of his *Vorlage* rather than directly cite it or omit it outright, it is also true that there are examples of narratives within 2 Chronicles 28 which have no apparent parallel in 2 Kings 16.

### **Material Added by the Chronicler with no Parallel in Kings**

The material undiscussed as of yet in this study is unique to the Chronicler's account of Ahaz's reign; no convergent account exists within the Deuteronomistic material.

Following the loss of Judah to Israel and Aram,<sup>231</sup> the Chronicler breaks his connection with the Deuteronomistic material and shifts instead to a discussion concerning the presumably Israelite prophet Oded.<sup>232</sup> 2 Chr 28:9-15 shift the focal point of discussion from the military loss of the king to the resulting aftermath of those losses on the Judean people. Explaining that bringing prisoners from Judah into the land will anger YHWH, Oded implores the Israelites not to proceed with their intended task.<sup>233</sup> The digression from the Ahaz account seems quite out of place as the Chronicler, who excludes discussions of Israel and its rulers unless it becomes integral to his work, provides an in-depth discussion of events that revolve solely around a group of Israelites.<sup>234</sup> More to the point, it describes these Israelites as responding positively to the word of YHWH, a

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<sup>230</sup> 2 Chr 28:25.

<sup>231</sup> 2 Chr 28:5-8.

<sup>232</sup> Oded's origin can likely be explained by the fact that he consistently uses the first plural form of verbs when speaking with the soldier, indicating a sense of common origin. This is coupled with the fact that in his speech, he differentiates between the people to which he is speaking and Judah.

<sup>233</sup> 2 Chr 28:9-11.

<sup>234</sup> McKenzie, *Chronicler's Use*, 113.

situation that seems to be a reversal of the status quo as last described in the time of Amaziah.<sup>235</sup> While it is true that the people most directly impacted by the request of Oded would have been the Judeans who were captured and subsequently released,<sup>236</sup> it is notable that there is no discussion of Ahaz or the fact that it was putatively his military weakness that allowed their deportation. The focus of the account is squarely on Israel and the Israelites.

The object of Oded's discussion appears to, more than anything else, emphasize the wrongdoings of his own people rather than those of Judah and Ahaz. Oded admits that YHWH's anger with Judah, not favor with Israel, is what allowed the soldiers to fight victoriously in battle.<sup>237</sup> However the act of taking Judeans prisoner with the intention of using them for slave labor would turn the wrath of YHWH from Judah onto them. Though he says that bringing the prisoners into Israel would be a grievous act, the prophet admits that the people of Israel are already guilty in the eyes of YHWH.<sup>238</sup> Of what sin they are guilty, he does not explicitly state. This idea is reiterated later in the section when leaders of Israel say that their actions have already caused divine anger to flare against them and that enslaving their captives would only exacerbate this anger.<sup>239</sup> It is possible that because the Chronicler did not recognize the legitimacy of the Israelite state and, therefore, needed to show that Israel could not be the recipient of divine favor in the long term, this prophetic excursus serves to show that Israel was still considered guilty despite their victory. Though they ultimately fed, clothed, and returned the

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<sup>235</sup> 2 Chr 25:7.

<sup>236</sup> According to Klein, *Chronicles*, 394, the release of the Judean prisoners at Jericho makes little historical sense. During the time of Ahaz, Jericho would have belonged to the Northern Kingdom.

<sup>237</sup> 2 Chr 29:9.

<sup>238</sup> 2 Chr 28:10-11.

<sup>239</sup> 2 Chr 28:13.



Judeans to their territory, the Israelites were aware that they did not have the favor of YHWH.<sup>240</sup> In this way, the Chronicler presents Ahaz as sinful, signified by his defeat at the hands of Aram and Israel, while maintaining his view of the Israelite state, still guilty despite its victory against Judah.<sup>241</sup>

### Conclusion

As it has been demonstrated, the Chronicler, approaching 2 Kings 16 under the supposition that the historical prologue determined the overall character of the remainder of the account, reinterpreted the account of Ahaz in an effort to intensify the negative regnal account of the king. When the material used by the Chronicler already appeared negative, such as the regnal evaluation, it was copied nearly wholesale into the Chronicler's work. When a portion of the text did not serve the purposes of the Chronicler, such as possibly portraying Ahaz in an ambivalent or possibly even positive light, he omitted things that were not pertinent to his cause and reinterpreted what he could in order to build a logical, coherent narrative. Though difficult to discern, the imperative of the historian in 2 Chronicles 28 appears plain: the primary objective of the Chronicler is to, at every available turn, color Ahaz in the most negative way possible; In so doing, there is a clear willingness on the part of the Chronicler to take liberties with his

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<sup>240</sup> Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 346-347.

<sup>241</sup> William Johnstone, *1 and 2 Chronicles Vol. 2: Guilt and Atonement*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 184. McKenzie, *1- 2 Chronicles*, 336-339, maintains that the captive narrative serves to both equalize Israel and Judah in terms of their transgressions and to typify the kinship connection between the two countries despite being embroiled in war. For McKenzie, this equalization sets the stage for a mutual repentance under Hezekiah in the following chapters. See also Williamson, *Israel*, 118.

sources while working to simultaneously represent the true underlying meaning of the text.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The problem which this study has endeavored to resolve is that, far too often, the accounts of the reign of Ahaz within the biblical texts have been unfairly accepted with little to no exploration into possible alternatives. Far too often, scholars rely on a previously offered interpretation of a text rather than taking the time to explore divergent explanations. The editorialization of 2 Kgs 16:2 on the part of the Josianic Deuteronomist proposed in chapter one of this study, though what some might deem speculative, would serve to explain the many problems of Isaiah 7, specifically the confusing attitude of Isaiah toward Ahaz. There are many scholars who believe that large sections of Isaiah 7 appear to connote a positive analysis of Ahaz, yet balk at this conclusion because they, knowingly or otherwise, rely heavily on the evaluation in 2 Kings 16 as an indicator of the classification of the king. It would also serve to explain the severity of the account of Ahaz's reign within the narrative of the Chronicler. The Chronicler, seeing that Ahaz was described as having not done what was upright in the eyes of YHWH and that he faced no further condemnation of his actions within the narrative of his reign, chose to reinterpret the events of Ahaz's rule in such a way that included the events of the source material, yet which reframed these in the negative light an evil king deserved.

The reasons behind the decision to take part in such a study are numerous and manifest. There has sadly never been a work composed which completely dedicates itself to the reign of Ahaz across the biblical tradition. The problem which this study has

endeavored to resolve is that, far too often, the accounts of the reign of Ahaz within the biblical texts have been unfairly accepted with little to no exploration into possible alternatives. Far too often, scholars rely on a previously offered interpretation of a text rather than taking the time to explore divergent explanations. The editorialization of 2 Kgs 16:2 on the part of the Josianic Deuteronomist proposed in chapter one of this study, though what some might deem speculative, would serve to explain the many problems of Isaiah 7, specifically the confusing attitude of Isaiah toward Ahaz. There are many scholars who believe that large sections of Isaiah 7 appear to connote a positive analysis of Ahaz, yet balk at this conclusion because they, knowingly or otherwise, rely heavily on the evaluation in 2 Kings 16 as an indicator of the classification of the king. It would also serve to explain the severity of the account of Ahaz's reign within the narrative of the Chronicler. The Chronicler, seeing that Ahaz was described as having not done what was upright in the eyes of YHWH and that he faced no further condemnation of his actions within the narrative of his reign, chose to reinterpret the events of Ahaz's rule in such a way that included the events of the source material, yet which reframed these in the negative light an evil king deserved.

It is important to recognize the necessity of devoting significant research and analyses to the reigns of all the kings which are mentioned in Kings and Chronicles. An understandably appropriate level of attention is paid to kings such as David and Solomon, as they are the foundation on top of which the subsequent regnal accounts are built. Ahab and Manasseh, the despised kings accused of leading their nations astray from the worship of YHWH, are the objects of discussion for both articles and monographs. Hezekiah and Josiah, the iconoclastic reformers of Judah have innumerable pages

dedicated to their reigns and the implications of their actions on the development of Israelite religion. However, it is an absolute necessity for scholars to scrutinize the reigns of the rulers of Israel and Judah that receive less attention within the biblical text. To assume that these accounts can be taken at face value or to rely on the interpretations of commenters and then simply discarded is to circumvent the possible currents running beneath the texts. This thesis is a beginning, a point from which constructive discussion can occur in an effort to bring a fuller understanding to a topic which is far too often ignored.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **“Good” Kings**

Asa	1 Kgs 15:11	<i>wy ‘ś ’ s’ hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehoshaphat	1 Kgs 22:43	<i>l’št hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehoash (of Judah)	2 Kgs 12:2	<i>wy ‘ś yhw’ š hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Amaziah	2 Kgs 14:3	<i>wy ‘ś hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Azariah	2 Kgs 15:3	<i>wy ‘ś hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jotham	2 Kgs 15:34	<i>wy ‘ś hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>

## Appendix B

### “Evil” Kings

Solomon	1 Kgs 11:6	<i>wy ‘ś šlmh hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jereboam	1 Kgs 13:33	<i>l’ šb yrb ‘m mdrky hr ‘h</i>
Rehoboam <sup>242</sup> :	1 Kgs 14:22	<i>wy ‘ś yhdh hāra ‘ bə ‘ênê yhwh</i>
Abijam:	1 Kgs 15:3	<i>wylk bkl ht ‘t ‘bw</i>
Nadab:	1 Kgs 15:26	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Baasha:	1 Kgs 15:34	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Elah	1 Kgs 1:8-14	-----
Zimri	1 Kgs 16:19b	<i>l’št hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Omri	1 Kgs 16:25	<i>wy ‘ś ‘mr hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Ahab	1 Kgs 16:30	<i>wy ‘ś ‘h ‘b bn ‘mr hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Ahaziah (Israel)	1 Kgs 22:52	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehoram (of Israel)	2 Kgs 3:2	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehoram (of Judah)	2 Kgs 8:18c	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Ahaziah (of Judah)	2 Kgs 8:27	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehu <sup>243</sup>	2 Kgs 10:28-30	-----
Jehoahaz	2 Kgs 13:2	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jehoash	2 Kgs 13:11	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Jeroboam II	2 Kgs 14:24	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Zechariah	2 Kgs 15:9	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Shallum	2 Kgs 15:13-16	-----
Menahem	2 Kgs 15:18	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Pekahiah	2 Kgs 15:24	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Pekah	2 Kgs 15:28	<i>wy ‘ś hr ‘ b ‘yny yhwh</i>
Ahaz**	2 Kgs 16:2	<i>wl’ ‘śh hyšr b ‘yny yhwh</i>

<sup>242</sup> Rehoboam does not necessarily receive a specific evaluation. Rather, this is said about the nation of Judah while under the reign of Rehoboam. The point stands.

<sup>243</sup> Jehu is a unique case in that contains both positive and negative elements in the account of his reign.