

A Model from Damascus

2 Kings 16

In the previous document, *The Rain and the Whirlwind*, it was noted that while at an interdenominational prayer meeting, that we did share what we felt was a word from the Lord. We didn't go into specifics in that document, but did feel that it was an important point to make. The message shared was a short summary of what is detailed below, having now felt multiple confirmations to write it down and share. The word is from 2 Kings 16. What I write is nothing new – it is simply God's Word! The understanding is nothing new, either. If you looked, you would likely find a great many similar interpretations! But what is important, I feel, is that the Lord highlighted these specific passages with some understanding of them because **He is warning His Church right now**. Which means that there is still time to return to Him, in everything we do. Beginning in verse 2 of 2 Kings 16:

² Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God like David his father. ³ He walked in the way of the kings of Israel and even made his son pass through the fire according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the children of Israel. ⁴ He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. ⁵ Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to battle, and they besieged Ahaz but could not subdue him. ⁶ At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram and expelled the Judeans from Elath. The Edomites came to Elath and live there to this day.

Judah is under siege by many enemies – one of which is Israel itself! Thus, attacked by some of God's own, chosen people. There is **great division among God's people**; not only that, but Ahaz is king and **practices the ways of other nations**, making their **children to pass through fire**. He worships and sacrifices to many false gods. **Idolatry is rampant**. Wickedness prevails throughout the land.

⁷ So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." ⁸ Then Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. ⁹ So the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria went up to Damascus, captured it, exiled the people to Kir, and killed Rezin.

What was the king's response to the enemies' attack? Did he consult with the Creator, the designer of the holy city? No. **He took the precious vessels in God's house** and handed them to an evil king. He used man's way of handling the situation rather than crying out to God. This is just a background of Judah's situation.

¹⁰ Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria and saw an altar that was in Damascus. King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a pattern of the altar and model of it, according to the manner of its construction. ¹¹ Uriah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. Thus Uriah the priest worked until King Ahaz came from

Damascus. ¹²When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, the king approached the altar and made offerings on it.

What irony! He was a wicked, evil king who walked in the ways of the surrounding nations. But then we read that **Ahaz, while sacrificing to idols, also still sacrificed to the Lord**. There was still a priest in the temple. Ahaz went to Damascus and was greatly impressed with an altar they had there. So, he took a **model of this altar and sent it to Uriah**, who then made a copy of it. Ahaz was impressed with the splendor of the Damascan altar, so he took it upon himself to build a new altar to match every detail. Why is this a problem?

“You shall make an altar ... and you shall overlay it with bronze. ... Just as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make it” - Exodus 27:1-8

Simply put, because it's not God's way. The LORD was very specific with the makeup of the altar. Thus, he and Uriah sinned by disobeying the LORD in favor of the way Damascus was doing it. Are we innocent of this? **We must consider our ways** (Haggai 1:7), and ask the LORD if we too, have been impressed with the way the world is doing things. **Have we taken a model of the world and applied it to the Church?** In many of the churches in America, you will observe a great many similarities with each other and the world. Just as the business world has a CEO, CTO, CFO and Director of this and that. Likewise, in many of the churches, these worldly titles are masked with “Senior Pastor”, “Junior Pastor”, “Director of Missions”, etc., **but the same organization chart exists**. In some of the larger churches these titles aren't even masked, as I was recently reminded, but use titles directly from the world, such as Chief Technology Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Marketing Director, etc. Understand that the titles themselves are not the issue. The issue is this: **we have taken a direct model replica of the business world and applied it to the Church**. Of course, the world's way of running an organization is extremely efficient when it comes to making money. But that's the problem! Is that what the church is about? We hope not. But you can't deny the existence of some churches who *refuse to speak on certain matters because of fear they will offend* those in their congregation, and thus, lose some of that precious tithing money. Tithing. Again, *something pure and from the LORD* that has been twisted into paying the electric bill for our enormous facilities and to *further support the elaborate hierarchy*, “so that they can do ministry.” We need to ask ourselves if we have offended the LORD in this! How else has the church become a model of the world? In every way! The **tithing money is used on fancy lights**, sound equipment, projectors, fog machines and cushy seats. Often times the musicians are even paid because *the church feels it needs to produce a top-quality performance*. **Performance!** Why does the church need this? Because it needs more members! Why? “For the Kingdom”, we say! Would they celebrate just as much if folks went to the church down the street? Or does it have to be “**my**” church (which I've heard some pastor's even say), so that the income continues to flow. This is to say nothing of the whole agreements we sign into place with the government concerning “non-profit” status.

These are extremely harsh and offensive words. I'm not saying that if your church bought some sound equipment that you've gone the way of Damascus. The LORD, in His wisdom, may certainly have a church buy sound equipment. I'm not to say. But I urge the Church to “**consider your ways**”, meaning, all of its ways. Everything that we do. To fast, pray, and seek the LORD to discover if there is any errant way in us. It really shouldn't be too hard to know, we **just need to ask: what have we modeled?**

The LORD's way of doing things is oftentimes very, very different than the way we would (just think how the Prince of Peace came into this world!) He has given us a model, and it's very simple, with Christ as the head and everyone else as members with a subset of elders. Most churches have elders, but oftentimes they have little power or authority. Almost as if to check off a requirement but totally miss the heart of it.

¹³ He offered his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured out his libations, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar. ¹⁴ And the bronze altar that was before the LORD he moved from the front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD. He put it on the north side of the new altar.

He continued in his idolatry, while at the same time, making sacrifices to the LORD – *his way*, on *his* altar. Note that he moved the bronze altar that was sanctioned by the LORD **to the North**. Why?

¹⁵ Then King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, "Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering, and his grain offering with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their libations. Sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice, and the bronze altar will be for me to inquire by." ¹⁶ So Uriah the priest did everything that King Ahaz commanded.

What nonsense. He goes *his own way* with everything – continues to sacrifice, keep up appearances, but everything according to *his way*. Yet, he keeps the bronze altar **in order to inquire of the Lord**. May we not be guilty of going our own way in everything, *but then suddenly when we need to hear from the LORD, try to go back to God's way*.

¹⁷ King Ahaz cut off the bases of the stands and removed the basin from them. He took down the sea from off the bronze oxen that were under it and put it on stone pavement. ¹⁸ The structure for the Sabbath that they had built in the house and the king's outer entrance he removed from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria.

The LORD has a structure for the Sabbath – do we follow the more direct, God-ordained path? Or have we removed it? The ESV says that he caused it to "go around the house of the LORD". Have we caused it to go around? Instead of the simple structure that He has designed for the Church, have we complicated it such that it completely goes *around* the house? Meaning, we still strive to reach the same destination – our heart is genuine – but we're taking the long way (which is ultimately disobedience), because we feel we can do better?

May the Church, being made into a **holy priesthood**, ***not*** act as Uriah the priest! Oh Lord, save us from any influence of the world! Oh Lord, may we all have open eyes and ears to Your Word! May we not be silent – but faithful watchmen!

⁵ Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem, and say: Blow the trumpet in the land. Cry aloud and say, "Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities." ⁶ Set up the standard toward Zion. Seek refuge, do not delay. For I will bring disaster **from the north**, and a great destruction. – Jeremiah 3:5-6