

Homiletics Analysis: 2 Chronicles 28

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Second Chronicles 28 recounts the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, one of the most comprehensively unfaithful kings in the Chronicler's narrative. The chapter moves in four distinct movements. First, Ahaz's theological departure is named plainly: he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, made metal images for the Baals, burned offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and sacrificed his own sons in fire — explicitly after the abominations of the nations the LORD drove out before Israel (vv. 1–4). Second, God's judicial response is immediate and direct: He gave Ahaz into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and carried away captives to Damascus, and then gave him into the hand of Pekah king of Israel, who struck down 120,000 men of Judah in one day (vv. 5–8). The Chronicler pauses the narrative to identify why: *because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers*. A prophet named Oded then intervenes in the north, confronting the Israelite army as they return with 200,000 captives from Judah, warning them that they have already accumulated great guilt before God, and that taking their kinsmen as slaves will compound divine wrath against them — a remarkable moment in which the northern kingdom is called to act with more covenant fidelity than the king of Judah (vv. 9–15). The captives are released, clothed, fed, and returned to Jericho. Third, Ahaz responds to military pressure not by turning to the LORD but by seeking help from the king of Assyria, stripping the temple and palace of their remaining treasures to purchase an alliance — which availed him nothing (vv. 16–21). Fourth, and most devastating, the Chronicler delivers his theological verdict in v. 22: *In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD*. Ahaz then imports the gods of Damascus, reasoning that since those gods had helped Syria against him, he should worship them so they might help him — a logic that is simultaneously idolatrous and absurd. He shuts the doors of the temple, cuts up its implements, and sets up altars at every corner of Jerusalem (vv. 22–25). He dies unmourned, buried without the honor of the royal tombs, and his son Hezekiah succeeds him.

This Text — Intent

The Chronicler is not primarily writing political history. He is writing theological history for a post-exilic community that needs to understand the logic of covenant unfaithfulness and its consequences. The intent of this chapter is to confront the reader with the full trajectory of covenant abandonment: it begins in worship, accelerates under pressure, and ends not in repentance but in deeper entrenchment. Crucially, the Chronicler inserts the Oded episode not to celebrate the north but to shame the south — and to demonstrate that God's word and God's mercy are not contingent on institutional affiliation. The chapter is

designed to make the reader feel the horror of spiritual self-destruction, to see that human beings under covenant obligation who reject God do not simply drift — they compound. The intent is both diagnostic and cautionary: *this is what the rejection of the LORD looks like when it runs its full course, and the time to turn is always before the distress deepens.*

Subject Sentence: Covenant abandonment by Ahaz produces escalating judgment and total spiritual collapse.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through Ahaz that rejecting Him in prosperity does not produce neutral consequences but sets in motion a self-compounding spiral of judgment, human misery, and deepening hardness — and that every moment of distress is simultaneously a moment of invitation that the faithless heart will refuse.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Oded Episode and the Northern Kingdom

The most interpretively significant moment in this chapter is the Oded episode (vv. 9–15), which many readers find surprising: a prophet intervening *in the northern kingdom* to call Israelite soldiers to release Judahite captives. Some readers flatten this into a general humanitarian principle — “God cares about captives regardless of their religious affiliation.” This is not wrong as far as it goes, but it misses the Chronicler’s structural point. The Chronicler is using the north, which has long been the foil of faithless religious innovation, to shame the south. Judah’s king has become *more* faithless than the northern kings; even the soldiers of the schismatic north are now capable of more obedience to God’s word than the Davidic king. The episode is not primarily about captive release — it is about the depth to which Ahaz has fallen relative to his covenant calling. A Wesleyan or broadly evangelical reading that emphasizes compassion and human dignity here is not wrong but is incomplete without the Chronicler’s primary theological intent.

“Immediate Retribution” in Chronicles

Dispensational and some conservative evangelical readers have noted that Chronicles appears to operate on a more explicit retribution theology than Samuel-Kings — blessings follow obedience, curses follow rebellion, in fairly tight sequence. This is a genuine observation and is relevant here: Ahaz’s apostasy in vv. 1–4 is followed immediately by military defeat in vv. 5–8, with the Chronicler providing the explicit causal link (*because they had forsaken the LORD*). Some readers use this to argue that Chronicles teaches a rigid temporal retribution — that faithlessness always produces immediate visible consequences. This overreaches. The retribution pattern in Chronicles is theological and typological, not mechanistic. The Chronicler is not teaching that every individual or

generation will see consequences in the same time frame; he is teaching that *the logic of covenant* moves in this direction, that judgment is real and traceable to forsaking God. The pastoral application is not “your current suffering proves your current sin” but “God’s justice is not blind to covenant betrayal, and His purposes move consistently through history toward the vindication of His covenant.” The Reformed reading holds the retribution pattern in canonical tension with Job, Lamentations, and Psalm 73 — all of which resist the mechanistic application of the same pattern.

Ahaz and Typological Readings

Some redemptive-historical readers rush quickly to read Ahaz as a type or foil to Christ — the son of David who destroys rather than protects, who shuts the temple rather than opens it, in anticipation of the one Son of David who will open wide access to God. This reading has genuine canonical warrant (it is coherent with the Chronicler’s David-Hezekiah-Solomon typology), but as a pitfall it can produce exposition that uses Ahaz primarily as a foil rather than engaging the text’s primary diagnostic claim. The Reformed reading holds both: yes, Ahaz functions within the Chronicler’s messianic typology, but the primary claim of this chapter is not typological — it is confrontational. The chapter is designed to produce recognition and horror in the reader, not primarily to gesture forward to Christ.

The Reformed Reading

The Reformed reading of 2 Chronicles 28 holds together three things simultaneously: (1) God’s sovereignty in judicial judgment — He *gives* Ahaz over to his enemies, not merely permitting but directing the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness; (2) the genuine responsibility and guilt of Ahaz — this is not fatalism; every moment of distress offered a genuine moment of return, and Ahaz chose the opposite in every case; (3) the grace embedded in the Oded episode — even within a narrative of total covenant collapse, God extends mercy to 200,000 captives through an unexpected instrument. These three cannot be collapsed into one another. The passage is neither simple retributionism, nor fatalistic predestination, nor generic humanitarian moralizing — it is the full Reformed vision of covenant, responsibility, and grace operating simultaneously.

Key Canonical Support

- **Deuteronomy 28:15–68** — The covenant curses that Ahaz’s faithlessness brings into operation: enemies overrunning the land, defeat in battle, the nation given into the hands of others. Ahaz is not experiencing arbitrary disaster; he is experiencing the covenant operating as designed.
- **2 Kings 16** — The parallel account of Ahaz’s reign, which Chronicles supplements significantly. Kings includes the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis and Ahaz’s appeal to Tiglath-Pileser; Chronicles omits most of this political narrative in favor of the

theological portrait, including the Oded episode absent from Kings. The comparison illuminates the Chronicler's theological priorities.

- **Isaiah 7:1–17** — Isaiah's encounter with Ahaz during the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis (the same period as 2 Chronicles 28), where Ahaz refuses the sign God offers through Isaiah ("I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test") — a refusal that appears pious but is in fact faithless. Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy emerges precisely from Ahaz's refusal. Canonical bridge: God works His greatest purposes *through* the faithlessness of covenant-breakers, not around it.
- **Romans 1:18–32** — The New Testament theological parallel to Ahaz's spiral: suppression of truth leads to idolatry, idolatry produces moral collapse, God gives over (*paredōken*) those who refuse Him to their own desires — a compounding downward movement that mirrors the Chronicler's portrait of Ahaz exactly. The "giving over" in 2 Chronicles 28 and Romans 1 share the same theological grammar.
- **Hebrews 3:12–15** — "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God... as long as it is called 'today,' exhort one another." The urgency of Hebrews 3 captures the intent of 2 Chronicles 28: every moment of distress is a *today* — and the hardened heart refuses it. The warning is to those inside the covenant community, not those outside it.

Aim: To confront the reader with the self-compounding logic of covenant unfaithfulness — the way hardness deepens under the very pressures designed to produce repentance — and to call them to respond to God in distress rather than away from Him.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Ahaz is 20 years old at his accession; reigns 16 years in Jerusalem; does not do what is right in the LORD's eyes as David his father did	The Davidic standard is the explicit baseline; Ahaz fails it immediately
2–4	Ahaz walks in the ways of the kings of Israel; makes metal images of Baals; burns offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; sacrifices his sons by fire; sacrifices and makes	Progressive intensification: each clause is more extreme; "after the abominations of the nations" is the Chronicler's severest judgment language

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	offerings on high places, hills, and under every green tree	
5	The LORD gives Ahaz into the hand of the king of Syria; Syria defeats him and takes many captives to Damascus. Also given into the hand of Pekah king of Israel, who strikes a great blow	The word “gave” (<i>wayittēhû</i>) is theologically loaded — God is the active agent of judgment, not a passive bystander
5b	Pekah strikes 120,000 men of Judah in one day — all valiant men	The scale is staggering; the word “valiant” makes the point that Judah’s military capacity was not the issue — the issue was divine withdrawal
6	Explicit causal statement: “because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers”	The Chronicler provides the interpretive key directly; no ambiguity is allowed
7	Zichri, an Ephraimite hero, kills Maaseiah the king’s son, Azrikam the commander of the palace, and Elkanah the second in command to the king	The slaughter reaches the royal household itself
8	The men of Israel take 200,000 captives from Judah — women, sons, daughters — along with much spoil, and bring them to Samaria	Covenant reversal: God’s people are now the captives of the schismatic north
9–11	The prophet Oded meets the army returning to Samaria; he proclaims that their victory was the LORD’s wrath against Judah, but that Israel’s own guilt is now great; he calls them to release the captives or face divine wrath	Oded’s logic is precise: God used them as instrument, but their excess has now made them guilty; they are not immune from accountability

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
12–13	Certain chiefs of the men of Ephraim support Oded; they confront the returning army and declare the captives must be released lest Israel's guilt before the LORD compound	Lay leaders in the north act on the prophet's word — a remarkable moment of northern obedience
14–15	The armed men release the captives; the chiefs provide clothing, sandals, food, drink, and ointment; they carry those who are feeble on donkeys; they bring them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their kinsmen	The restoration is comprehensive — physical care, dignity, return home
16	At that time Ahaz sends to the king of Assyria for help	The parallel is devastating: while the north obeys God's word and restores captives, Ahaz seeks a foreign power rather than turning to the LORD
17–18	The Edomites have again invaded and struck Judah and taken captives; the Philistines have raided cities of the Shephelah and the Negeb	The military pressure intensifies from multiple directions simultaneously
19	Explicit theological statement: "For the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the LORD"	Ahaz is called "king of Israel" — a devastating description; he has become what the enemy is
20–21	The king of Assyria comes against Ahaz but afflicts him instead of strengthening him; Ahaz strips the temple, the palace, and the princes to pay Assyria — and it does not help him	Every human alliance fails; the resources of worship are spent on an alliance that produces only betrayal

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
22	“In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD — this same King Ahaz”	The Chronicler’s theological verdict, stated with rhetorical emphasis: <i>this same King Ahaz</i>
23	Ahaz sacrifices to the gods of Damascus who struck him, reasoning that since those gods helped Syria against him, they will help him if he worships them	The logic is simultaneously pragmatic and spiritually insane; the gods of the defeated are adopted from the victor
24	Ahaz gathers the vessels of the house of God, cuts them in pieces, shuts the doors of the house of the LORD, and sets up altars at every corner in Jerusalem	The systematic dismantling of covenant worship; the temple doors are shut
25	He makes high places in every city of Judah to make offerings to other gods, provoking the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger	The spread of false worship throughout the land — Ahaz’s influence has corrupted the entire kingdom
26–27	The rest of Ahaz’s acts are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel; Ahaz sleeps with his fathers, buried in Jerusalem but not in the tombs of the kings of Israel; Hezekiah his son reigns in his place	Burial outside the royal tombs is a final dishonor; the succession to Hezekiah provides the narrative’s hope

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–4	The Theological Verdict: Ahaz’s Total Apostasy
2	5–8	The Judicial Consequence: God Gives Ahaz Over
3	9–15	The Oded Interruption: Grace and Obedience from an Unexpected Quarter

Division	Verses	Label
4	16–21	The Double Failure: Human Alliance Replaces Divine Reliance
5	22–25	The Deepening: Distress Produces Deeper Faithlessness, Not Repentance
6	26–27	The Epitaph: Dishonored in Death, Succeeded by Hope

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Covenant abandonment by Ahaz produces escalating judgment and total spiritual collapse.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through Ahaz that rejecting Him in prosperity does not produce neutral consequences but sets in motion a self-compounding spiral of judgment, human misery, and deepening hardness — and that every moment of distress is simultaneously a moment of invitation that the faithless heart will refuse.

Applications (Five)

1. The direction of your worship determines the direction of your life — and small deviations compound. (*Mind/Belief*) Ahaz’s collapse does not begin with shutting the temple doors. It begins in vv. 2–4 with worship substitutions that appear to be private religious preference — making images, offering at high places, following the northern pattern. The Chronicler shows that these early moves determine the whole trajectory. The reader needs to understand that worship is not one compartment of life among others — it is the controlling variable. Where the functional god of the heart goes, the whole person follows. This means that the spiritually formative question is not “have I done anything dramatically wrong?” but “what am I most fundamentally depending on, delighting in, and directing my desires toward?” The idols that finally destroy Ahaz were already present in embryonic form before the first military defeat.

2. God’s use of suffering as invitation does not guarantee that it will be received as invitation. (*Mind/Belief*) The chapter’s most theologically disturbing verse is v. 22: “In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD.” The reader must sit with this long enough to feel its horror. God permits — and in a covenantal sense directs — the suffering of Ahaz not to destroy him but because suffering is the most common mechanism by which hardened hearts are cracked open. But Ahaz’s response to suffering is not return — it is deeper entrenchment. This does not mean God’s intent was wrong; it

means the heart's capacity for self-justification and blame-transfer is deeper than we typically acknowledge. The application for the reader is double: first, do not assume your suffering is proof of God's abandonment — it may be precisely the moment of His most urgent invitation; second, examine whether your response to pressure drives you toward God or toward substitutes. The pattern of Ahaz is available to every human being.

3. Feel the grief of worshipping something that cannot help you and will not.

(Affections/Worship) Verse 23 is one of the most pitiable moments in the entire narrative: Ahaz reasons that because the gods of Damascus defeated him, those gods must be powerful, and so he worships them in the hope that they will be powerful for him. He is worshipping the gods of his conqueror. The reader should feel the profound sadness of this — not contempt, but grief. This is what misplaced worship looks like from the inside: it has its own internal logic, its own desperate pragmatism, its own felt urgency. The reader ought to feel the pull of it — “I tried God and it went badly, so let me try this other thing” — and then feel the horror of where that logic leads. Worship that is genuinely oriented toward the living God includes an affective component: grief for the idolatry of others and recognition of how easily the same logic operates in one's own heart.

4. When you are under pressure, the question is not “what will help me?” but “to whom will I turn?” *(Will/Behavior)* The contrast in this chapter is structurally precise: Ahaz under pressure turns to Assyria (v. 16); the northern leaders under pressure turn to the word of the prophet (vv. 12–15). The practical question for the reader is not abstract — it is: when your business is threatened, when your marriage is strained, when your health is uncertain, when your finances are compressed, what is your first move? The compulsive reach for human alliances, financial solutions, relational manipulation, or simply the numbing of anxiety through distraction — these are the functional equivalents of Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-Pileser. The concrete application is this: identify the current pressure point in your life and ask whether your response to it has included a serious, sustained, expectant turning to God — or whether you have been stripping your own temple to pay for an Assyrian alliance that will not help you.

5. Do not close the doors of the house of the LORD — whatever the cost of keeping them open. *(Will/Behavior)* Verse 24 records one of the most physically concrete acts of apostasy in the entire Old Testament: Ahaz shuts the doors of the temple. The temple in Chronicles is not merely a building — it is the visible, architectural embodiment of God's presence with His people, the place of access, of sacrifice, of prayer, of covenant renewal. Shutting its doors is the physical expression of the entire reign summarized. For the contemporary reader, the application must be made concrete: the corporate worship of God's people, the regular engagement with Scripture, the disciplines of prayer and Lord's Table and community — these are the “open doors” of covenant access available to the believer. The reader must ask: what pressures, embarrassments, busyness, resentments, or spiritual laziness are slowly moving your hand toward those doors? Do not let them close. The cost of keeping them open is always less than the cost of closing them.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Second Chronicles 28 teaches that God is sovereign over the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness — not as a distant judge who eventually notices, but as the active agent who *gives* His people over to judgment when they abandon Him. The verb “gave” (*wayittānēhû*, v. 5) is theologically irreducible: God is not merely permitting Syria and Israel to defeat Judah, He is directing it, as the operative logic of His covenant. This does not diminish human responsibility — Ahaz’s guilt is declared explicitly and repeatedly — but it establishes that history is not random and that covenant betrayal has a built-in trajectory toward judgment. The chapter also teaches that God’s mercy does not require faithful instruments: He speaks through Oded and produces obedience among northern soldiers who have no standing in the Davidic covenant, demonstrating that grace is always sovereign and always surprising. Finally, the chapter teaches that human beings are capable of deepening their own hardness under the very pressure God intends for their rescue — a sobering word about the capacity of the unrepentant heart.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Second Chronicles 28 is a sustained illustration of what Reformed theology means by the bondage of the will under sin: Ahaz does not simply make a series of bad choices that he could have reversed at any moment — he is shown to be a man whose heart is so oriented away from God that every external pressure designed to produce repentance produces instead its opposite. This is not fatalism; Ahaz is responsible for every decision. But it is a picture of the will in the service of disordered worship — a will that cannot correct itself from within. The chapter also illustrates the Reformed understanding of common grace: God restrains the evil of the northern soldiers through the prophet Oded and through lay leaders who act on his word, demonstrating that grace extends beyond the institutional covenant community. Most significantly, the Oded episode and the Hezekiah succession together demonstrate the Reformed conviction that God’s covenant purposes cannot be ultimately frustrated by human unfaithfulness — the doors Ahaz shuts, Hezekiah will reopen (2 Chron. 29:3). The gospel operates precisely in this space: where the faithless son of David destroys, the faithful Son of David restores — and His restoration is secured not by human cooperation but by the sovereignty of God who raises up the next king when the current one has exhausted every possibility of self-destruction.

Main Takeaway

Ahaz shows you what happens when a person entrusted with God’s covenant replaces worship with idolatry and then, under every pressure designed to wake him up, doubles down. The doors of the temple end up shut. The vessels end up cut to pieces. The allies

end up useless. If you are in distress today, God has not abandoned you — He is calling you. But the heart that says “I will not turn to Him; I will try this other thing” is not neutral — it is moving in Ahaz’s direction. Turn now. The door is still open.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Reducing the chapter to a morality tale about “making bad choices.”** The Chronicler is not simply saying that Ahaz made poor decisions. He is showing the theological logic of covenant abandonment — how it operates, how it compounds, and what it looks like when it runs its full course. A sermon that reduces this to “make good choices, not bad ones” has missed the diagnostic power of the text entirely. The passage is designed to produce recognition and fear, not merely instruction.
- **Treating the Oded episode as a detour or interruption.** Many expositors move through vv. 9–15 quickly because they seem to interrupt the Ahaz narrative. But this section is structurally central to the Chronicler’s theological argument: it is the point at which the comparison between Ahaz’s faithlessness and ordinary northern obedience reaches its sharpest edge. To skip over it or treat it as a humanitarian aside is to miss the Chronicler’s deepest indictment of Ahaz.
- **Applying v. 22 as a proof-text for “the heart is deceitful” without grounding it in the passage’s narrative argument.** Verse 22 is one of the most psychologically precise verses in Chronicles, but it is precise because it comes at the end of a narrative that has shown the full trajectory. To extract it without the buildup is to lose its force. The expositor should let the whole narrative build to v. 22 so that the reader feels its weight, not simply note it as a proof-text.
- **Preaching the Oded episode in a way that holds up the northern leaders as moral exemplars to imitate.** The point is not that the northern soldiers were admirable people who model good behavior. The point is that their obedience shames Judah’s king. The application is not “be like these men” — it is “Ahaz has fallen below the standard of people who have far less covenant privilege than he has.” The Clowney anti-moralism principle applies: the application must be rooted in the covenant logic, not in the exemplary behavior of secondary characters.
- **Failing to connect Ahaz’s reign to Hezekiah’s reversal.** The chapter ends with Hezekiah’s succession. For the Chronicler, this is not incidental — it is the theological resolution that the narrative is building toward. An exposition of chapter 28 that does not at least gesture toward the Hezekiah reversal (2 Chron. 29–31) fails to capture the Chronicler’s hope. The doors Ahaz shuts will be reopened. The vessels he dismantles will be restored. God’s covenant purposes survive the worst of human faithlessness.

- **Using Ahaz's apostasy to generate a mechanical retribution theology.** The chapter is explicit that Judah's military defeats are connected to their covenant unfaithfulness. But the expositor must not turn this into a pastoral framework in which every suffering person is told their suffering is the result of their sin. The retribution pattern in Chronicles operates at the level of covenant history and national judgment, not as a personal prosperity-gospel framework. The canonical check is Job, Psalm 73, and John 9:1–3 — all of which resist the mechanistic application of the same logic to individual experience.