

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY24 2024

crossroads

Scripture Story: 2 Chronicles 14–16; 1 Kings 15:8–16:34.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 8.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Again and again in the Bible we find this description of an Israelite king: "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (1 Kings 22:52; 2 Kings 8:18; 15:18; etc., NIV). Therefore it's refreshing to find that rare exception when a king such as Asa is remembered as one who "did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 14:2, NIV). In ancient Israel, full devotion to God was a rare virtue.

Full devotion is still a rare virtue today. In many respects ours is a culture of compromise. Nevertheless, Jesus still calls us to be sold out, signed up, and fully committed to building the kingdom of God on earth. Ellen White spoke of the need for fully devoted men (and no doubt, women are called to this high ideal as well) when she wrote: "The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall" (*Education*, p. 57).

In many respects Asa was a committed follower of God. He obeyed God during the first 10 years of his reign. He abolished much of the idolatry in Judah. He deposed Maacah, his idolatrous grandmother. And by fully relinquishing the battle to God, he scored a great victory in crushing Cush's army. In comparison to the evil exploits of Ahab and Jezebel, Asa offers some redemptive qualities to focus on in this lesson.

Asa's legacy, however, is not free from failure. He made alliances with foreign nations and evil people. Then he responded with rage when Hanani confronted him with his sin. In spite of such blunders, he is still remembered in a positive way. Second Chronicles 15:17 offers this summary: "Although he did not remove the high places from Israel, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life" (NIV).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Learn about some of the lesser-known characters in Israel's history. *(Know)*
- Discover the rich lessons to be learned from God's people in the past. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to fully commit to Jesus Christ. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Great Controversy, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 8

"All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. You can build on this exercise by doing the following activity.*

Illustration

You may want to bring a candle that relights and share this illustration in your own words:

Many people approach spiritual life like an assignment to keep blowing out candles that are designed to reignite and keep burning. Some people think, *If I can just blow out pride and gluttony and lust and so on, then maybe I'll at least look like a Christian.* That's a sure recipe for failure. Soon you will feel defeated and exhausted.

So what's the answer? The key is not to blow harder; rather, it is to remain in the presence of Jesus. For sin and Jesus cannot coexist in the same heart. Your battle is to always remain in the presence of God in order to let His life be willed through you.

It's like the father who tells of watching his 3-year-old daughter fight the temptation of the cookie jar. The girl doesn't notice that her father is watching from a distance. So she climbs a shelf in the pantry and stretches to snitch a snack. Now she knows the cookie jar is off-limits. Her spirit wants to resist temptation but her flesh craves a sugar hit. Just as she grabs a cookie, Dad clears his throat. Instantly she drops the cookie and scoots away.

Think about it: one moment the kid could not resist temptation but in an instant she models the resolution of a saint. What made the difference? Simple—it was the presence of her father.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Our battles with temptation work the same way. In our own strength, the flesh always wins. But when we live in the presence of our heavenly Father, we are then positioned to allow God to fight the battle for us.

Thomas Kelly put it this way: "Don't grit your teeth and clench your fists and say, 'I will! I will!' Relax. Take hands off. Submit yourself to God. Learn to live in the passive voice . . . and let life be willed through you."[1]

King Asa discovered this spiritual principle when he won an epic battle against the formidable Cushites. Rather than fighting in his strength, however, he "called to the LORD his God and said, 'LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. LORD, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you' " (2 Chronicles 14:11, NIV). In doing this, Asa discovered that "the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15, NIV).

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Who are the main actors in the story?
- *Underline* the parts of the story that are key to understanding it.
- What new thing about God do you learn through the story of Asa? Ahab? Jezebel?
- Chart the spiritual ups and downs of Asa's life. Why do you think Asa wandered from God after such a promising start as king? What safeguards can we put into our lives so that we don't repeat Asa's mistakes?
- Compare the stories of Asa, Ahab, and Jezebel. What lessons can we learn from each?
- Which of the disciples most reminds you of Asa? Why? Which of the disciples most reminds you of Ahab? Why?
- How does Asa's story inform our approach to a secular culture today?
- How are we to reconcile the violent wars in Israel's history with "holy wars" that are being fought today?
- What can we learn about reverence from this lesson?
- How does Asa's life illustrate the following spiritual principles?

  —God will not only reinforce good, but confront evil.

  —Full commitment to God will yield favor-

able results.

—How well a plan works is not necessarily an indication of God's approval.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Joshua 24:15; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:8; Matthew 16:24–26; Mark 8:34–38; 1 John 2:15–17; 1 Peter 1:6, 7.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. During Asa's reign in Judah, there was no real peace between Judah and Israel. Second Chronicles 14:1 does record that "Asa his son succeeded him as king, and in his days the country was at peace for ten years" (NIV). This decade of peace is not mentioned in 1 Kings 15:16. On the contrary, it says "there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel throughout their reigns" (NIV). This does not mean that there was continual combat and fighting throughout Asa's reign of 41 years (see 2 Chronicles 16:13 and 1 Kings 15:10); rather, there was continual tension between the 10 tribes of Israel in the north, and the two tribes in Asa's kingdom in the south.
2. Who were the Cushites that God defeated through Asa? Cush (from the Hebrew word meaning "unknown") was a son of Ham and the ancestor of five primary people groups: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca (Genesis 10:6-8; 1 Chronicles 1:8). The land of the Cushites was known to the ancients as Ethiopia and referred to the land south of Egypt. Later, it was called Nubia, now referred to as Sudan.
3. Chapters 14 and 15 of 2 Chronicles really need to be read together, as they show the two aspects of Asa's reform in Judah. First, in chapter 14, we find the outward prosperity of Asa's reforms. In chapter 15 we find the inward and religious account of Asa's reforms.

   "There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (2 Chronicles 15:19, NIV).
4. Second Chronicles 15:16 records that Asa deposed his grandmother, the queen mother, "because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah" (NIV). Wikipedia.com offers this background on Asherah poles:

   —An Asherah is a secret tree or pole . . . to honor the Ugaritic mother-goddess Asherah.

   —Asherah poles are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, the Books of Kings, the second Book of Chronicles, and the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah. . . .

   The Hebrew Bible suggests that the poles were made of wood. In the sixth chapter of the Book of Judges, God [told] Gideon to cut down an Asherah pole that was next to an

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

History as Story

"Don't know much about history," the old song goes. Indeed, for some students history can be a seen as a sure cure for insomnia.

If you're finding that your students' eyes are glazing over as you slog through these lessons that cover the history of the ancient kings of Israel, don't despair. Although history can be a difficult subject to teach, it helps if you present these lessons in the form of a story. For example, perhaps you (or a volunteer actor) can dress up as King Asa and come tell the story as a first-person narrative. Maybe you can invite a rabbi from the local Jewish synagogue to come and share the history of the Jewish people in story form. Another option is to find a movie that depicts life in ancient Israel during the time of these kings. The point is, students should be much more receptive to learning these lessons from history if they are shared as interesting stories, rather than historical facts to be memorized.

altar to Baal. The wood was to be used for a burnt offering.

The Hebrew Bible states that God hated Asherah poles (Deuteronomy 16:21, NIV).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

On a poster board, compile a list of what your students say are their priorities. Have them call out everything that comes to mind. They may suggest things such as school, money, friends, church, food, and so on. Write them down. Then discuss how faith fits in. If someone's highest priority was to be a fully committed follower of Christ, how would the priorities listed on the board be affected? If a person's desire was to leave Asa's legacy ("Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life" [2 Chronicles 15:17, NIV]), what would that life look like on a day-to-day basis in the world today? How would this desire impact a person's priorities?

Faith is not about trying harder to be good; rather it is about living in the presence of Jesus. In this personal friendship with Jesus, full commitment to Him flourishes. Close with time for prayer, giving your group time with God in silent prayer.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Asa was a man of God. One commentary describes him like this: "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days. The first ten years of his life were occupied in abolishing idolatry and in religious reforms. Acknowledging God in all his ways, Asa was divinely directed."[2]

Asa was not perfect. But he called upon the Lord for help, and God raced to his rescue. Consequently, like David, Asa is remembered as a great king with a heart for God.

We, too, can do extraordinary things by God's power. All it takes is a personal relationship with Jesus and the courage to trust in His providence.

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[1] Thomas Kelly, "Holy Obedience," as quoted from www.quaker.org/pamphlets/wpl1939a.html.

[2] Herbert Lockyer, *All the Kings and Queens of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), p. 118.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 8.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 2 Chronicles 14–16; 1 Kings 15:8–16:34.
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crossroads



Photo Getty Images

keytext

"For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

(2 Chronicles 16:9, NIV)

flashlight

"Alas, how had the glory of Israel departed! Never before had the chosen people of God fallen so low in apostasy. Of 'the prophets of Baal' there were 'four hundred and fifty,' besides four hundred 'prophets of the groves.' 1 Kings 18:19. Nothing short of the miracle-working power of God could preserve the nation from utter destruction. Israel had voluntarily separated herself from Jehovah, yet the Lord in compassion still yearned after those who had been led into sin, and He was about to send to them one of the mightiest of His prophets, through whom many were to be led back to allegiance to the God of their fathers" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 116).

what do you think?

Rank the following spiritual battles from the easiest (1) to the hardest (10):

___ Keeping pure thoughts
___ Refraining from gossip
___ Being honest in schoolwork
___ Speaking only words of kindness
___ Managing anger
___ Spending adequate time with God
___ Refraining from drinking alcohol
___ Helping the undeserving
___ Setting appropriate relationship boundaries
___ Believing in God through hard times

did you know?

In an attempt to keep the different characters in the story straight, note the role each person played and the Hebrew meaning behind their name.

Asa (King of Judah)—"Physician" or "Doctor" or "Deity."

Omri (Made king of Israel instead of Zimri who had slain Elah)—"Bundle of corn" or "Impetuous" or "Jehovah apportions."

Ahab (Son of Omri, and his successor as the seventh king of Israel)—"Father's brother" or "Uncle."

Jezebel (Wife of Ahab and queen of Israel)—"Condemned" or "The woman who was a she-devil."

Hanani (The prophet who rebuked Asa for bribing Ben-Hadad)—"Jehovah is gracious" or "He hath shewed me mercy."

Baasha (King of Israel)—"Boldness" or "Offensive" or "He who lays waste."

Ben-Hadad (King of Aram, or Syria, who was bribed by Asa to break his alliance with King Baasha)—"Son of the god Hadah."

Abijah (The father of Asa)—"Jehovah is my Father" or "Father of the sea."

INTO THE STORY

"Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. . . . He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his laws and commands."

"The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, 'Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them.' "

"Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the LORD's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. 'Let there be a treaty between me and you,' he said, 'as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me.'

"Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. . . . When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and abandoned his work. . . .

"At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: 'Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. . . . For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.'

"Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people."

"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him."

"There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife."

(2 Chronicles 14:2, 4; 15:1–4; 16:2–5, 7, 9, 10; 1 Kings 16:30; 21:25, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

If you were to teach the story of Asa to kindergartners, what would you tell them is the main lesson we can learn from it?

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_____
_____

What does the story of Asa teach us about being fully devoted to God?

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What do the examples of Ahab and Jezebel teach us about secularism and worldliness?

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Asa made some big mistakes in his life and yet the Bible says: "Although he did not remove the high places from Israel, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life" (2 Chronicles 15:17, NIV). How do you explain this verse? If Asa allowed some idol worship to continue, and then he was involved in a shady deal with Ben-Hadad, how is it that he was "fully committed to the LORD all his life"? What comparisons might you make between King David and Asa? Are there any other characters in the Bible whose stories are similar to Asa's?

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punch lines

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' " **(Matthew 16:24, NIV).**

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" **(John 15:8, NIV).**

"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation' " **(Acts 2:40, NIV).**

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good" **(Psalm 14:1, NIV).**

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" **(Hebrews 13:8, NIV).**

further insight

"The true Christian will make God first and last and best in everything. No ambitious motives will chill his love for God; steadily, perseveringly, will he cause honor to redound to his heavenly Father."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 68

Sabbath

Read Romans 7:15.

Review the *What Do You Think?* section. Then summarize today's Bible passage in your own words.

Sunday

Read Matthew 16:24.

Review the story of Asa in the *Into* and *Out of the Story* sections of the lesson. How does his story intersect with the following teachings of Jesus?

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14, NIV).

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24–27, NIV).

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30, NIV).

Monday

Read 2 Chronicles 16:9.

Review the *Key Text* for this week and reflect on the following questions:

In what specific ways does God "strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him"?

What does it mean for me to commit my heart fully to God?

What were the consequences for Asa because he had done foolish things? What are some of the consequences I have experienced because of my foolish decisions?

Tuesday

Read Acts 2:40.

After pursuing other gods, Israel plummeted into apostasy. In the *Flashlight* section, Ellen White writes: "Nothing short of the miracle-working power of God could preserve the nation from utter destruction."

What modern-day idols (things as well as unhealthy or inappropriate relationships) steal our devotion from God? How do these idols lead to destruction? How is God at work today to give us grace and power to stay focused on Him and avoid destruction?

Wednesday

Choose your favorite text from the *Punch Lines* and rewrite it in your own words.

Thursday

Read 2 Chronicles 16:7–10.

The prophet Hanani spoke a strong word of rebuke against Asa. Asa was not receptive to this reprimand. Instead of humbly searching his soul and confessing his sin, he "was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people" (2 Chronicles 16:10, NIV).

How do you receive constructive criticism? Do you appreciate it when God sends a word of reproof to you through a friend or family member? Why or why not?

How might Asa's legacy be different had he humbly received Hanani's reproof? What can you learn from Asa's reaction to criticism?

Friday

Read 2 Chronicles 15:17.

The story of King Asa reminds us that God is still looking for followers who are "fully committed." In what way might the followers of Christ today be involved, but not committed. Ask yourself these questions:

Am I involved or committed?

What would it mean for me to totally sell out to God?

What is God's dream for my life that can be realized only by radical commitment?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 8.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.