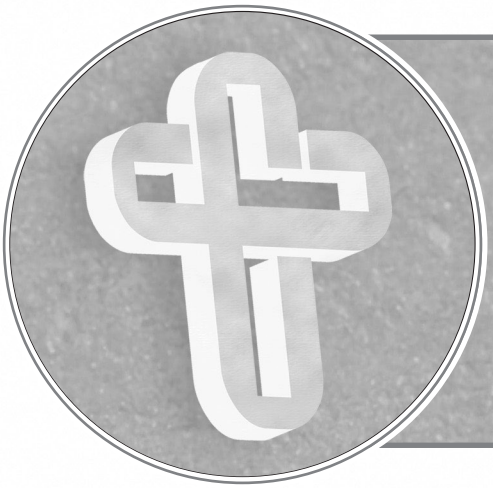


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JUNE 01 2024

a leader's influence

Scripture Story: 2 Chronicles 28:1-5; 2 Kings 16.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 27.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

When Ahaz assumed the throne of Judah following the death of Jotham, the inhabitants of Judah had no idea what they were in for. Under Ahaz's reign, Judah fell into an apostasy so great that the Temple worship was halted and shrines to foreign gods were established under every spreading tree. The people were encouraged by their king to worship whomever they wanted to, whenever they wanted to. In the Valley of Hinnom, Ahaz even sacrificed his own son in the flames of Molech.

Why did Ahaz fail in such a spectacular way? It is clear from his record that fear played a significant role in Ahaz's inability to choose the right path. Beset by King Pekah of Israel and King Resin of Syria, Ahaz made a crucial mistake: He went to the king of Assyria for help instead of to God. Isaiah warned him that he had nothing to fear as long as God was with him, but Ahaz would not listen.

The Assyrians did save him, but it came at a high price, for the Assyrians, not content with the treasures from the Temple given them by Ahaz, now eyed the whole kingdom of Judah. Furthermore, Ahaz believed that the gods of the Assyrians had protected Judah, so he promulgated the worship of these gods throughout the realm. Entreaties were made, but Ahaz did not listen. In so doing he hastened God's judgments.

Today, many of God's people are trading the seeming insecurity of a "faceless" God for the security of money, fame, friends, spouses, houses, etc. They are also buying into the worldview of postmodernism—that is, believing that there is no absolute moral standard, and that all beliefs hold equal validity. God's people today may not be setting up idols and worshipping them, but actually they are doing so with their ideas/beliefs/values. They fear taking a godly moral position on anything, lest they be considered "small-minded" or "bigoted." The issue of understanding worldviews is key in order to witness for Christ more effectively.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that obedience to God is an act of worship and it is best to do so even when we are apprehensive. *(Know)*
- Embrace God's call to place no other gods before Him. *(Feel)*
- Ask God to show them what in their lives must go to make room for Him. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 11

"Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us. . . . (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. Once completed, discuss their responses.*

The answers to the *What Do You Think?* activity are as follows: 1c, 2e, 3d, 4a, 5b.

Ask the following discussion questions:

1. When a leader is doing wrong, why don't more people oppose him or her?
2. When the leader claims to be acting in the name of God, how do we determine whether he or she is indeed doing so or not?
3. Can one leader's evil acts cause an entire nation to likewise do evil? In the case of a murderous regime, do the people have a choice of whether or not to go along with what is happening?

Illustration

Share this illustration from Mark Finley's devotional, Solid Ground:

Al Kasha told his friends that he had to be alone in order to be creative. What they didn't know was that he had to be alone in order to survive. Crowds terrified him. Out in a restaurant or at a supermarket he'd start to hyperventilate, his heart would palpitate, and his hands would perspire. The panic attacks would send him rushing home.

Al had become agoraphobic, afraid to go out anywhere, a prisoner in his own home.

It all started after he made it big as a songwriter, with 13 gold albums and two Academy Awards. Wrote Al, "I had created a life based on doing and having and achieving to the point that I had a nervous breakdown."

Al began systematically constricting his life. One morning when he was at a particularly low point, Al flipped on the TV. A minister quoted the Bible verse "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:8). Those words went straight to Al's heart. He listened intently as the minister talked about God's kind of acceptance.

Al Kasha began weeping and crying out to God. As he prayed he heard a voice say, "I love you, and you are My son."

Strengthened by God's love, he was finally able to respond positively to his overwhelming fears. Al's compressed life expanded within the security of God's presence.

Fear often results from feeling out of control. We are afraid of the unknown, about what might happen. But when we open our hearts to God's love, He gradually dissolves our fears.

There is security in God's love. We are not in control, but He is. There is a sense that He loves us and desires only our best. Ellen White wrote, "His love is as far above all other love as the heavens are above the earth. He watches over His children with a love that is measureless and everlasting" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 481). His "measureless and everlasting" love gives us complete confidence that our lives are in His hands.

You can trust in His love today. You can rest in His love right now. Be assured that His love will indeed cast out all fear.[1]

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Fear makes cowards of us all at one time or another, so we shouldn't be too hard on Ahaz, or should we? If to whom much is given, much is required, then those in leadership roles bear a greater responsibility for their choices than do those who follow them. What makes the difference? In a word—influence.

A leader's influence has the potential to make or break an organization. And when that leader operates out of fear rather than assurance, he or she is dangerous. In the case of Ahaz, his fear of destruction coupled with a broken connection to God led to open apostasy.

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.*

- Ahaz comes to the throne at an early age—20—the son of a good, though not great, king. What role might age have played in Ahaz's decision-making?
- 2 Kings 16:3 tells us who Ahaz's role models were. What was it about the kings of Israel that so enticed this king of Judah?
- *Circle* places in the story where godly counsel would have served Ahaz well. Ask the students to make a list of possible options opened to Ahaz.
- Consider sharing with your students a time in your life when fear got the better of you. What lesson did you learn from that experience?
- Ahaz took the gold and silver from the Temple

and gave them to the king of Assyria. Was this act a type of worship of a foreign god?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story:

Matthew 23; Revelation 22:8, 9; Romans 1:18-24.

Sharing Context and Background

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

There are several players who enter and exit the life of Ahaz. Here are a few more details about them.

1. **Tiglath-Pileser.** Biblical scholars have traced the reign of Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, to the time period between 747 B.C. and 727 B.C. During those 20 years, Tiglath-Pileser was a busy king. Before his kingship, the vast territory of Assyria was held together largely by force, a fix that didn't work very well. Instead of attempting to subdue the realm by force, Tiglath-Pileser created a regional power structure that helped to destabilize powerful underlings in outlying regions of the Assyrian Kingdom. He also made several changes to the military structure, forcing conquered peoples to serve as the infantrymen in his army, while native Assyrians held higher positions, such as cavalrymen and charioteers. This simple change enlarged his forces and allowed them to fight year round, as opposed to once per year. He used this power to ruthlessly oppress all surrounding nations that dared stand up to him.[2]
2. **The Prophets**. We know that Isaiah prophesied during the reign of King Ahaz, but he was not alone. Ellen White notes: "The prophet Micah, who bore his testimony during those troublous times, declared that sinners in Zion, while claiming to 'lean upon the Lord,' and blasphemously boasting, 'Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us,' continued to 'build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.' Micah 3:11, 10" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 322). Hosea was also prophesying during the period in Judah. God through Hosea spoke this pronouncement against Israel: "Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law" (Hosea 8:1, NIV). Ironically, Ahaz rarely looked for guidance from these anointed men of God, probably because he did not like what they had to say. Are we sometimes like him?
3. **Practical Godliness Needed**. Micah beautifully captures one of the excuses used by the people of the time to avoid seeking God: "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?" (Micah 6:6, NIV). Notice the subtle indictment of God: "We are not sure how to please God. He is too hard to serve. Nothing appeases Him," they seem to say. If you recognize this idea it is because you've heard it before. It is the charge leveled at God by Satan. But Micah has a very practical answer for the people's recalcitrance. "He has shown you, O mortal,

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

Worth a Thousand Words

The old saying goes: "A picture is worth a thousand words." Consider doing a Google image search for pictures of the god Molech. Several exist. Download a high quality picture to show to your class. Molech is the god to whom human babies were sacrificed.

Try to give the students some idea of the distance that God's people had fallen since He had given them the Ten Commandments, the first of which states that we should have no other gods before Him.

what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV). God was not asking for some spectacular sacrifice then, and He isn't asking for it now.

4. **State Religion.** Ahaz was able to do something that no other king of Judah had been able to pull off: He made the worship of Assyrian gods the official state religion of Judah. Heretofore, the worship of pagan deities occurred in the "high places" first constructed by Solomon to make his many foreign wives feel at home. These shrines were still around, but Ahaz took pagan worship to epic heights. Whenever humans attempt to institute a single form of worship, whether it be Christian or not, what inevitably happens is that true worship is prohibited and false worship is promoted. This is what happened in Jerusalem, and state-sanctioned worship will be the rule of the day before Jesus comes again.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Ask students to generate on a blackboard a list of "gods" that people worship today. Money, pleasure, homes, etc., are a few everyday gods many worship. For each of the gods mentioned, ask the students to share what benefits they think these gods bring to the lives of those who worship them. Finally, ask: How might something we like or enjoy become a god in our lives?

Pray, asking God to help us keep Him first in our lives at all times.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The kingdom of Judah descended into open sin under the leadership of Ahaz. Almost immediately after coming to the throne, he was faced with a vexing problem. Two kings had amassed their armies to fight against him, and he simply did not know what to do. Faced with similar odds, many of us might be tempted to lean on arms of flesh instead of on God. And that's what Ahaz did. In so doing Ahaz introduced for the first time in Jerusalem the worship of Assyrian (Babylonian) gods and deities. This false worship was no sideshow. It became the official religion of the land.

The fearful actions of fearful King Ahaz can teach us much. One lesson we can learn is that when burdened by cares, we should take those cares to God to seek His guidance. Another lesson we can take away from this episode is that influence is a gift from God that has powerful effects for good or evil on those who follow us. We owe the world around us a godly example, but we owe God, and God alone, our worship.

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[1]Mark Finley, *Solid Ground* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2003), p. 252.

[2]www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=212&letter=T&search=Tiglath-Pileser.

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 27.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 2 Chronicles 28:1-5; 2 Kings 16.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 27.

a leader's influence



Photo by Alden Ho

keytext

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD."

(2 Chronicles 28:1, NIV)

flashlight

"This was indeed a time of great peril for the chosen nation. Only a few short years, and the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel were to be scattered among the nations of heathendom. And in the kingdom of Judah also the outlook was dark. The forces for good were rapidly diminishing, the forces for evil multiplying. The prophet Micah, viewing the situation, was constrained to exclaim: 'The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men.' 'The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.' Micah 7:2, 4. 'Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,' declared Isaiah, 'we should have been as Sodom, and . . . Gomorrah.' Isaiah 1:9" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 324).

what do you think?

The Bible mentions great and awful leaders, but none of them are truly perfect. Only our faith in God can clean us of our sins. The following are some of the most faithful leaders in the Bible. Try to match each of them with their deeds.

1. Noah ___a. Traveled by foot over 10,000 miles and suffered greatly in efforts of sharing God's message.
2. Daniel ___b. Often remembered for his humility and his loyalty to God. His growing leadership skills helped unite Israel.
3. Abraham ___c. The world mocked him for following God's orders, but his efforts gave the human race another chance at life.
4. Paul ___d. Pleaded with God on behalf of others and was willing to sacrifice his own son to do God's will.
5. David ___e. He lived his life in full obedience to God, and risked his life more than once while doing faithful service for the Lord.

did you know?

Did you know that some of God's people offered their children as human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech? The practice was done in a place called Topheth or altar, in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. The prophet Micah hints why: "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7, NIV). They thought this practice would appease God.

INTO THE STORY

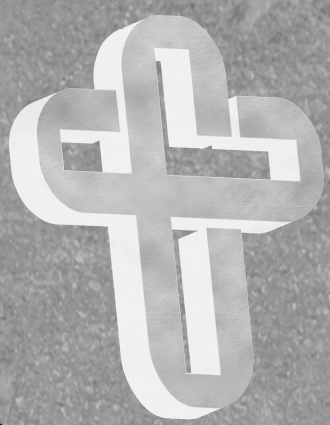
"In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

"Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him. At that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram by driving out the people of Judah. Edomites then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.

"Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, 'I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.' And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

"Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction. So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned. When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it."

(2 Kings 16:1-12, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Have you ever read this passage of Scripture before? What is new to you?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Place an X at each point in the story where Ahaz should have talked to God.

Circle the names of all the "minor" characters who play a part in Ahaz's life. What specific contribution does each make to Ahaz's life?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What spiritual lessons will you take away from this passage?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Where do you see God in this narrative?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you see God's hand anywhere in Ahaz's life or the circumstances in which he found himself? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles' " **(1 Samuel 8:19, 20, NIV).**

"Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd" **(Exodus 23:2, NIV).**

"Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God" **(Leviticus 26:1, NIV).**

"Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the LORD your God, and serve him only" ' " **(Matthew 4:10, NIV).**

"But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go" **(Deuteronomy 12:5, NIV).**

further insight

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. . . . Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. . . . Thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 70

Sabbath

Read 2 Kings 14:3; 16:2, 3; 2 Chronicles 28:1.

Did you successfully match the names of men of faith with their godly actions?

From today's reading, how were bad political leaders described in the Bible?

_____

_____

Thankfully the Bible gives us numerous examples of individuals who followed God and turned to Him for counsel and leading. To whom do you turn for godly counsel, and why?

_____

_____

Sunday

Read Deuteronomy 12:5.

After reading the *Into the Story* section and completing the *Out of the Story* questions, consider this question: Was there anyone to whom Ahaz could have turned for godly counsel? Do some research to find out which prophets were in the land of Judah during his kingship. (Hint: One of them is considered the greatest Old Testament prophet.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Monday

Read 2 Chronicles 28:1; 34:1-3.

This week's *Key Text* tells us that Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign. Do you think his relative youth had anything to do with his poor spiritual decisions? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Why was King Josiah faithful to God even as a young king, and Ahaz was not? Was Ahaz born bad and Josiah born good?

_____

_____

_____

Find a godly, older individual and ask him/her to tell you of an experience in which they made a bad decision because of their age. What lesson(s) did they learn?

_____

_____

_____

Tuesday

Read Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 5:14.

This week's *Flashlight* could have been taken straight out of some sci-fi movie. According to God's servant, Ellen G. White, dark satanic forces seemed to be winning the battle for Israel and Judah. Think right now about the world in which we are living. If you did not know God, how would you find hope amid the chaos in our world? What is the role of Christians in a world such as this?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wednesday

Read Revelation 14:6, 7.

Read and think carefully about *Punch Lines* for this week. There are a couple of themes running through them. One is the call of God to avoid the peer pressure of the crowd when it is doing wrong. The other is found in today's passage. _____ It is the foundation on which earth's final battle will be built.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thursday

Read Leviticus 26:1.

Are there any idols in your life? Here are some questions that might help you find out. What do you spend the majority of your leisure time doing? What specific pleasure do you derive from the person or activity occupying your carefree moments?

Try this: Add up the time you spend

Texting _____ minutes/day
E-mailing _____ minutes/day
Surfing _____ minutes/day
Social Media _____ minutes/day
Total _____ minutes/day

Then, dedicate half of this time to getting to know God better through prayer, Bible study, serving others, or sharing your faith.

Friday

Read Matthew 4:10.

Set aside a quiet moment this evening. Turn off your cell phone, computer, tablet—everything. Get your space really quiet. Then, get a piece of paper and something to write with. Finish the following statements: My relationship with God would be much tighter if I would let go of _____

_____

_____

It's not easy to do it, but I plan to _____

_____

_____

The day I plan to start this is _____ _____. The person I will get to help me stay accountable is _____

Close with a prayer, asking God for strength to overcome whatever is preventing you from getting closer to Him.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 27.

**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 http://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.