



bad moon rising

Scripture Story: 2 Chronicles 28:1-5; 2 Kings 16.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, 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 making a

Faustian bargain.

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

- Humility
- Growth/transformation in Christ¹
- Decision-making
- How to witness

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

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

Invite the students to share other current and former leaders—political or not—whose dastardly acts

stain their legacy. Then 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 in your own words:

When the Communists overran China, missionary Isobel Kuhn escaped on foot with her young son, Danny, across the dangerous snow-covered Pienma Pass. She finally arrived at Myitkyina in Upper Burma, but there she was stranded "at the world's end" without money, unable to speak the language, and still half a globe away from home. "I cannot tell you the dismay and alarm that filled me," she later wrote.

But in her perplexity, she made two decisions. "The first thing is to cast out fear," she said. "The only fear a Christian should entertain is the fear of sin. All other fears are from Satan sent to confuse and weaken us. How often the Lord reiterated to His disciples, 'Be not afraid!'" So Isobel knelt and spread her heart before Him. "I refused to be afraid and asked Him to cast such fears out of my heart."

Her second determination was to "seek light for the next step." She had no idea how to get out of Asia, but with God's help she could figure out what to do that day to provide food and funds, to find a safe place to stay, to find a means of communicating with the outside world.

Eventually she arrived back home, safe and sound, but it came by trusting God for guidance in small increments, taking the journey one footprint at a time (Robert J. Morgan, *The Red Sea Rules* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001], pp. 64, 65).

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 showed you, O man, 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

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**

Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **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 read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

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.

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.

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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.

¹ Fundamental Belief No. 11.

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*, chapter 27.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.