CHILDREN’S SACRIFICE

Someone suggested that Luchiezzi, a smart entrepreneur in South America, seek out a priest from Afro-Brazilian occultist religion. Why not try it? he thought. After paying for the animal sacrifices and for the priest’s services, his business started to grow. The more he advanced in that cult, the more he prospered.

He ended up owning a large fleet of brand-new trucks, while living in luxury. But Luchiezzi became terrified when the priest told him that the guiding entity was asking for his son in sacrifice. He left horrified, never to return.

A few days later he received a message from the priest saying that if he would not come back, he would lose all that he had gained, and even his life. Nightmares replaced sleep, and fear was now controlling him. That week he started to lose, one by one, all his trucks. Accidents, fire, thefts, and arrests gradually ravaged his properties.

He started to wonder if there wouldn’t be another side in the spiritual realm. That same day an Adventist offered him a Bible study. After a while the whole family was baptized. Starting a new business from scratch, he said to the pastor, “I now have peace and freedom because I worship the Creator of heaven and earth.”

The story of King Ahaz will reveal the terrible loss implied in rejecting God’s invitation to test Him. It will also show us that sacrificial giving is not necessarily a virtue or a positive trait of character, unless we choose the right recipient. We will also discover that offerings, when directed to demons, become far more costly than surrendering our whole lives to the Creator!
Write out 2 Chronicles 28:16–27 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out 2 Chronicles 28:19. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
A committed Christian didn’t see any risk in frequently associating his family with an unbelieving family. Eventually it led to traveling and doing business together, with his son later marrying a girl from that family. This is mirrored in the story of the good king Jehoshaphat of Judah, who mingled his family with the family of the Israelite king Ahab. The pervaded apostasy and idolatry that was brought to Judah through this association controlled most of the following kings of Judah, ending up in their destruction by the Babylonians centuries later.

One of the most wicked descendants of Jehoshaphat was King Ahaz. Not indifferent to the spiritual realm, this religious king invested lots of resources in sacrificing and burning incense on high places, hills, and under every green tree (see 2 Chron. 28:4). So great was his willingness to please his gods that he came to the point of sacrificing his own son (v. 3).

Losing God’s special protection, Ahaz was attacked by Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel. With his conscience stricken, he and his people feared tremendously. At that time Isaiah the prophet appealed to him to fear the Lord instead (Isa. 8:12, 13) and to rest and be quiet because the wicked alliance would not stand (Isa. 7:5–7). But “if you will not believe, surely you shall not be established,” said Isaiah (v. 9).

In trying to help the king to believe, God invited him to ask for a sign—whatever he would choose (vv. 10, 11). “Here is one of the greatest invitations to faith ever given to a human being. . . . God placed no restrictions in fine print. . . . He was ready and willing to empty all of heaven and earth for a wicked king if he would only believe!” (Roy E. Gane, *Adult Bible Study Guide* [student version], Jan. 12, 2021, 23). Maybe Ahaz thought he was too far from God. Rejecting any help, the king refused God’s invitation to test Him and sealed his fate. Is it possible that some of us may also be rejecting Jesus’ invitation to test Him?

Afraid of further defeats, Ahaz called for the help of Assyria, removing “part of the treasures from the house of the Lord, from the house of the king, and from the leaders” (2 Chron. 28:21) and giving them to the king of Assyria. The nation defeated Syria, but then harassed Judah as well. He also sacrificed to the gods of the Syrians, who had defeated him, believing that those gods could also help him. The more he got in trouble, the more he grew unfaithful to the Lord. Ahaz also cut in pieces the articles of the house of God and shut up its doors, interrupting the services (in form only) that were still in place. Finally, he made altars to offer sacrifices and burned incense in every corner of Jerusalem and every single city of Judah (see vv. 24, 25).

This neurotic and obsessive giver was hated by his subjects. He wasn’t even granted space in the tombs of the kings after his death at age 36. There is no record of a single good deed in his short life! This sad story tells us about the terrible consequences of the unequal yoke, as well as of refusing to test the Lord when there is an invitation from Him for us to do so.
Ahaz was not a close-fisted type of person. Rather his pagan mindset led him to become extremely liberal while giving, expecting supernatural protection from the idols (demons). Some choose to seek protection from the spirits because these spirits would not challenge their lifestyle or invite them to a holy life. But as Ahaz’s story shows (and many modern stories also), spirits will end up making the situation worse.

Some Christians may be tempted to return their tithes and offerings to God under that same pagan motivation—in exchange of God’s blessings or protection—something that is unbiblical and therefore unacceptable to God. He expects us to give, not primarily expecting future blessings, but in answer to blessings already received, as a response for His protective care! The fact that they should be ideally given as a proportion of the income or increase should be a remembrance of the fact that we are unable to give unless we receive something.

While trying to please demons, Ahaz rejected God’s initiative to guide him, through the main means that He has in store for instructing sinners—the ministry of prophets. When someone disregards God’s messengers—canonical or noncanonical prophets—what more will have God in store for guiding His children? “If they don’t hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead,” says Jesus in Luke 16:31.

Incidentally, there is no evidence of a classification of prophets as canonical (those whose writings are registered in the Bible) or noncanonical during Old Testament times. As a matter of fact, no prophet was canonical at the time of their ministry, be it Isaiah, Nathan, or Deborah. Nevertheless, God always expects that His messages, sent through His prophets, would be believed and practiced.

Therefore, if Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift is a genuine manifestation of God’s Spirit (even though she is not a canonical prophet), any contempt for the prophetic authority of her messages may finally lead us to also disregard the Bible, because both writings have the same origin.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God invited Ahaz to test Him (Isa. 7:10), but Ahaz declined the offer, indicating that he would not test God’s patience. His lack of connection with God and his disregard for the prophetic voice led him to ignore that by rejecting God’s invitation to test Him, he was rejection God Himself.

In reality, “Ahaz was not even willing to allow God to help him to believe. He barred and bolted the door of his heart to shut out faith.” (Roy E. Gane, Adult Bible Study Guide [student version], Jan. 12, 2021, 23.) After the king’s refusal to test the Lord, Isaiah clearly indicated that God was no longer Ahaz’s God (compare vv. 10 and 13). (Idea taken from R. Gane, Adult Bible Study Guide [student version], Jan. 12, 2021, 23.) (Cont. on p. 61)
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Isaiah 1:10–12
Isaiah 59:1, 2
Deuteronomy 28:45–51
Deuteronomy 30:15–20
Ezekiel 33:11
Matthew 22:36–40
Isaiah 58:10, 11
Malachi 3:7–12

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with 2 Chronicles 28:16–27?

(Cont. from inTerpret p. 60): How serious can unwillingness to test the Lord be when He is the one inviting us to do so?

Are we not also at the risk of ignoring the prophetic voice and God’s invitation to test Him? Take, for instance, God’s invitation to try Him as found in Malachi 3:10: “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse . . . and try Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’” Not to test Him after this invitation means to follow Ahaz’s behavior, barring and bolting the door of the heart “to shut out faith.”
THE COSTLIEST OFFERING

We can only imagine what motivated Ahaz to offer his son as a burnt offering—a practice that was common for the surrounding idolatrous nations. In almost every pagan religion, you take the initiative. You need to pay, suffer, or sacrifice to appease or please the deities and spirits. It is believed that the more you pay or suffer, the more you get in return.

Constantly surrounded by threats from almost every side, Ahaz was in great need of protection. In desperate need of supernatural help, he offers his most costly possession! How could he gaze into the anguished eyes of his child as he placed him in the arms of that glowing idol? How could he feel the smell of his son’s roasted flesh while looking to the ascending smoke?

Centuries before, one of his ancestors faced a similar situation. But as Abraham was about to lower the knife over his most costly offering, a voice from heaven prevented him killing Isaac. God had provided a Substitute for his son—God’s costliest Offering—His own Son!

It is a clear truth in the Bible that we are never required to pay for our acceptance through offerings or tithe. Instead, we are invited to accept God’s costliest offering—Jesus Christ—as a free gift, a propitiation for our sins.

When you confess your sins, no matter your past and guilt, and believe that Jesus’ offering is accepted by the Father on your behalf, you have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), are no longer under condemnation (Rom. 8:1), and have become God’s child. Your life becomes the accomplishment of God’s eternal purpose, which is always for your good (Jer. 29:11; Rom. 8:28).

As a result, regular offerings and the tithe are required by God as a proportion of the material blessings He gave us every time He blesses us (they are regulated by God’s giving). Through this act of worship God helps us to look back to His blessings and realize that they became possible only because of Jesus’ death—God’s costliest offering. By taking the load of our sins upon Himself and by forgiving them through His death, Jesus opened the door for us to receive all other blessings. (Remember that God cannot prosper willful sinners; those who do not confess their sins do not allow Jesus to pay for them!)

Ahaz conversely gave incessantly, gave too much (even his son), and gave before the blessings in expectation of them. Moved by an uncontrolled giving frenzy, he gave far more than he would have returned tithes and regular offerings, as prescribed by God. After giving so much, instead of being protected, he was ruined by the demons.

God’s worshippers are called to return tithes and regular offerings always after God’s giving, as a recognition for His giving and never before! If given in an attempt to bribe God in exchange for His blessings, they will not be accepted. God is actually the one who is “bribing” us, because He is always the one who initiates the giving process.

It would have cost far less for Ahaz to accept God’s offering, bringing the tithes and regular offerings as prescribed by God in a grateful act of worship. But he refused, trying to pay himself with incredible costly offerings—to no avail. Let us accept today God’s merciful invitation to receive His costliest offering!
**HIGHER THAN DUTY**

The Lord of heaven challenges those whom He has supplied with His bounties to prove Him. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

This message has lost none of its force. It is just as fresh in its importance as God's gifts are fresh and continual. There is no difficulty in understanding our duty in the light of this message, given through God's holy prophet. We are not left to stumble along in darkness and disobedience. The truth is plainly stated, and it can be clearly understood by all who wish to be honest in the sight of God. A tithe of all our income is the Lord's. He lays His hand upon that portion which He has specified that we shall return to Him, and says, I allow you to use My bounties after you have laid aside the tenth, and have come before Me with gifts and offerings.

The Lord calls for His tithe to be given in to His treasury. Strictly, honestly, and faithfully, let this portion be returned to Him. Besides this, He calls for your gifts and offerings.... If men are unfaithful in rendering to God His own, if they disregard God's charge to His stewards, they will not long have the blessing of that which the Lord has entrusted to them.

The Lord has given to every man his work. His servants are to act in partnership with Him. If they choose, men may refuse to connect themselves with their Maker; they may refuse to give themselves to His service, and trade upon His entrusted goods; they may fail to exercise frugality and self-denial, and may forget that the Lord requires a return of what He has given them. All such are unfaithful stewards. (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940], 82, 83.)

He tells us that He will open the windows of heaven, and pour us out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. He pledges His word, “I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.” Thus His word is our assurance that He will so bless us that we shall have still larger tithes and offerings to bestow. “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.” (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 89.)

Duty is duty, and should be performed for its own sake. But the Lord has compassion upon us in our fallen condition, and accompanies His commands with promises. He calls upon His people to prove Him, declaring that He will reward obedience with the richest blessings.... He encourages us to give to Him, declaring that the returns He makes to us will be proportionate to our gifts to Him. “He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” God is not unrighteous to forget your work and your labor of love. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 90, 91.)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why did the Lord protect David, Jehoshaphat, and others from their enemies, but did not protect Ahaz? Isn’t God a God who discriminates, a respecter of persons? Explain.

Why is it so serious if someone refuses to test the Lord when God Himself is inviting us to test Him?

Ahaz gave a lot of his own resources to worship idols (and spirits). What was his motivation? By contrast, what should motivate true Christians to bring regular offerings and the tithe?

Why won’t sacrificing too much and giving too much necessarily promote God’s acceptance of my offering?

If we are supposed to return tithes and regular offerings in recognition of blessings and not in expectation of them, why does God still promise to bless us after we bring them?