

Judgement on Ahaziah

AHAB, the wicked king of Israel, had been killed in battle. He was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who seemed determined to try and outdo his father in wickedness. The Bible record is most emphatic:

He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin (1 Kings 22:52).

A little later it says that he provoked the Lord God in all the ways his father had done. It does not take much imagination to see that everything Ahaziah was doing would be abhorrent to God. There is only one encouraging comment about Ahaziah's life: that he only reigned for two years.

Another Wrong Choice

The way in which Ahaziah was removed is very instructive. He apparently met with an accident.

Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured (2 Kings 1:2).

The record suggests that Ahaziah was leaning through a lattice or window, perhaps over the windowsill, and had overbalanced and fallen. The fall was sufficiently serious to make him very ill,

and he decided to ask Baal-Zebub, the idol of Ekron, whether he would recover. Baal-Zebub means 'the lord of the flies', and he appears in the New Testament as Beelzebul, or the prince of demons.

It was a deliberate snub to the Lord God to consult an idol about his recovery. Had he asked the living God, He would have been able to answer properly.

Once again, Elijah was asked to intervene. An angel told him to meet the messengers and ask a direct question:

Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" (v3).

There was a God in Israel, the living God, in contrast to the gods of all the surrounding nations. Those idols were made of wood or stone, and of course were unable to help in any way at all.

Elijah not only had a question for the messengers, he also had an answer for Ahaziah:

Now therefore, thus says the LORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die' (v4).

It was a death sentence and a clear condemnation of Ahaziah and all that he

stood for. He had decided to oppose God and continued to do so even when he was mortally sick. It was because of this that his life was shortened.

A Leather Belt

The messengers returned to the king and relayed Elijah's message. It had taken them less time than expected, as they had not needed to go all the way to Ekron. They had to explain what had happened to them and the message they had been given. However, they did not recognise the man who had met them as Elijah.

Ahaziah sensed immediately who this was likely to be. He asked his messengers about the kind of man who had met them, to receive this response:

"A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite" (v8).

The king was in no doubt about the prophet's identity.

More Poor Judgement

For some reason, the king felt it necessary to consult Elijah further. Perhaps he wanted to know if there was anything he could do to change the sentence of death which Elijah had pronounced.

He did so by sending one of his army captains with his fifty men to demand that Elijah return to Samaria with them to speak to the king. There was nothing subtle about the approach or the message,

it was calculated to put Elijah in his place. Ahaziah was forgetting (or ignoring the fact) that Elijah was a prophet, the representative of the Lord God in heaven.

Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'" (v9).

We must remember that what happened next was not to establish Elijah's position, but God's. It was not for the king to command a prophet of God. Hence the devastating reply from Elijah.

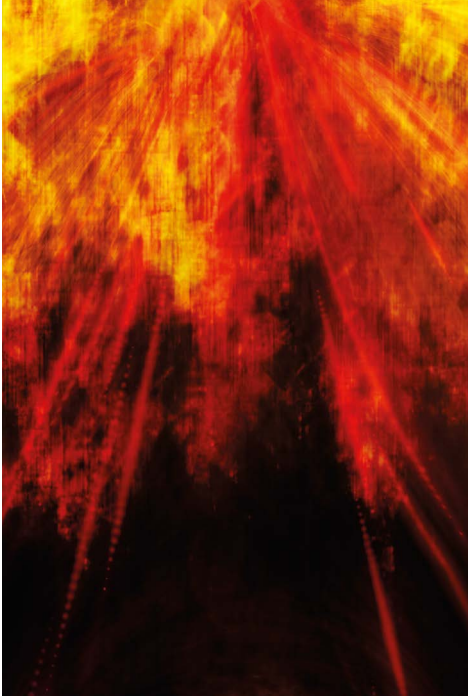
So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty (v10).

Fifty-one men lay dead, a testimony to how King Ahaziah had failed to take note of the respect due to a representative of God.

Somehow the news reached the king that his messengers were dead, and that they had not been able to persuade Elijah to return with them. Undaunted he sent a second captain with his men to summon Elijah to come to see him. This captain had learned nothing from the disastrous events which had overtaken his predecessor. His words were almost identical:

Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!' (v11).

Not surprisingly Elijah acted in exactly the same way. This was not the way to



sight. Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties with their fifties. But let my life now be precious in your sight (v13–14).

It was a more reverential and respectful approach, which acknowledged Elijah's position as the prophet of God. There were to be no more deaths of Ahaziah's messengers.

Judgement on the King

Elijah received assurance from the angel that he should go with this captain and his fifty. He came to the king with a stark message. He had ignored God when he could have listened to Him; now God was to let him suffer the consequences of his sin.

Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die' (v16).

Ahaziah may be seen as an obscure king of Israel, but his life teaches an important lesson. The Lord God must be approached with reverence, in the way He demands. We cannot expect Him to look after us if we constantly and wilfully ignore Him and His wishes.

This was the last mission of Elijah. Shortly he was to complete the handover to Elisha, preparation for which had started after they first met.

approach a prophet of God, less still the Lord God himself.

"If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty (v12).

Now 102 men had been consumed by fire because they had not come reverently before the representative of the Lord God.

Humility Pays

Ahaziah tried a third time, but fortunately the captain of the third fifty seems to have learned the lessons of his two predecessors. When he reached Elijah, he acknowledged his position and was much more humble in his approach:

Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your

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