

## **“ELIJAH AND FIRE FROM HEAVEN.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**January 23, 2022, 6 PM**

**Text for the Sermon: II Kings 1:1-18**

### **Introduction.**

As the saying goes, the nut doesn't fall far from the tree.

**I Kings 22:52-53** He [Ahaziah] did what was 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 made Israel to sin. 53 He served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done.

Like father, like son. In the case of Ahaziah it is like father, like mother, like grandfather. His wickedness is a triple wickedness. He raises the bar, if that is possible. He embraced all the accumulated sin and folly and perversion and paganism of his parents and grandparents.

*Ahaziah provoked the Lord, the God of Israel.* He galled, goaded, aggravated God to anger.

He worshiped Jeroboam's calves in Samaria and he worshiped Baal. His path is one of sheer rebellion.

Ahaziah saw where his parent's idolatry had led, and yet he followed the same path.

### **II Kings 1:1-8, Ahaziah's fall and folly.**

The providence of God is over all the earth, and the judgment of God finds Ahaziah. Even safe and secure in his own home, the hand of God is there. When we are opposing God, we are never safe from God. We cannot hide.

**Hebrews 4:13** No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Ahaziah puts his hope in and seeks wisdom from a statue stuck in a temple in Ekron in Philistia. This is staggering when you remember his parent's god was embarrassingly exposed as impotent by Elijah on Mt. Carmel. This might be why three times God emphasizes what must be a central point:

**II Kings 1:3, 6, 16** “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?”

Do you really still think there is not God in Israel? What Ahaziah did was blasphemous, a great offense to God, and utter folly. To inquire of a deaf and dumb object is consulting with Satan rather than with God.

God detests idols. He always has. He will always expose the folly of following idols. To follow an idol is to have God as your enemy. God is intolerant when it comes to idols.

As God sent Samuel to Saul when he inquired of the witch of Endor, so God sends Elijah to King Ahaziah when he inquires of Baalzebub.

How un-politically correct of God not to allow a man to follow his religious preferences and engage in freedom of religion. Baal is Ahaziah's god of choice. But Ahaziah is king of Israel. God is not a democratic God, God is not a go along with the majority God, God is a jealous God, jealous for His glory and His authority, jealous for the hearts of His people whom He has created for His glory.

People on the brink of death should of all people be the most sober and clear-headed, the most open to the truth. Yet the specter of death doesn't help Ahaziah one bit. Death is no time to be playing around with false ideas.

As with all interruptions and confrontations, God is both severe and merciful. In this confrontation is one last opportunity to turn, to repent, to see the error of one's ways.

But alas, "A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."

Just as the Pharisees were more hell bent to destroy Jesus, the more Jesus said and did. Ahaziah was not willing to receive any reproof or correction or rebuke.

## **II Kings 1:9-12, fire from heaven.**

This is not one of commentator's favorite passages in the Bible. The annihilation of seemingly innocent men from the king by fire seems morally pointless and therefore morally reprehensible. This is offensive to all middle-class refinements and sensibilities.

I am aware that there are people who read texts like this one in the OT and come to the conclusion God is bad, evil. If God does this sort of thing they want no part of Him. They put God in the dock, on the witness stand, and judge Him to be guilty and not worthy of being God. Clearly God is not a good and loving God.

When I read a text like this in the OT I have an entirely different response. I am humbled by such a passage. It challenges me and my faith. It exposes my shallow understanding of God, it tells me God's ways and God's thought are not my ways and thoughts. It tells me God is God, that there is so much more to Him than meets the eye, that He doesn't fit into my neat little boxes. I am reminded I am finite, small, weak, foolish compared to God.

Texts like this force me to think, study, learn, grow. Only when we approach a passage like this in faith and in the fear of the Lord can we hope to be helped by God's Holy Spirit to understand Him and His ways.

You could say the way the first two captains approached Elijah is like those who come to God with their demands, expectations, preconceived notions, telling God what to do and how to do it.

The third captain approached Elijah like those who come to God humbly, ready to submit to Him, surrendering to Him.

Is this miracle story defensible? Why? How?

### ***First of all, who is to blame?***

Is Elijah for asking such a thing, or God for doing such a thing? If Elijah had asked something wrong or bad, God would not have answered. Elijah had no power or authority to bring down fire.

Clearly God did this and what God does He does for His own glory, to show His power and justice.

### ***What is the intent?***

Can there be a good or moral intent to this action?

Why did Ahaziah send a military unit of fifty men? As an escort service? Because he wanted to talk with Elijah more in-depth about the meaning of his first message?

No, this a warrant for Elijah's arrest. This was an open declaration of war, weapons of intimidation meant to bully or terrorize the prophet.

Ahaziah hears Elijah's message and rather than repent or at least show remorse, he shows his utter contempt for the prophet and his word. He shows contempt of God by assuming this is only about Elijah, and that the problem can be solved by killing Elijah. Silence the prophet and all his worries are over. Talked about shooting the messenger.

He has no fear of the Lord, nothing gets through to him to lead him to repentance. Men don't like having their sin exposed. They don't like warnings they don't like.

The first captain of fifty commands Elijah to surrender because the king has said so. This is arrogance. He calls him a man of God, not because he necessarily believes he is one, just a title. He doesn't respect him as a true prophet of the living God.

Ahaziah shows himself to be stubborn, hard-hearted, obstinate, unmoved by the first fire, so he doubles down.

The second captain of fifty shows even more contempt both of the prophetic office and of God and His Word. Undaunted by the first, he ordered “O man of God, come down quickly.” They were bold, reckless, daring in the face of Elijah and his God.

### *Why did God respond with fire?*

It’s not for revenge or anger or personal vindictiveness on Elijah’s part. If it had been any of those things God would not have answered.

What would you guess is the most obvious connection? Remember the god contest on Mt. Carmel where fire was the burning issue.

There God burned up the sacrifice on behalf of sinners, here the sinners are burned up for refusing to acknowledge or accept God’s sacrifice and atonement. The God who answered by fire was the real God. Fire is proof that Baal is nothing.

This proves Elijah is a true prophet of the true God, that his mission and calling are real, to reveal the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Don’t think all miracles are good miracles. Some of them are judicial miracles, miracles of judgment. The first commandment really matters. Don’t push God to have to respond this way.

“If God must go to that extreme to get your attention then you, like Ahaziah, must be in high-hopeless unbelief” (Davis, *II Kings*, p. 22).

When you mock God and show contempt for the things of God and His representatives, you are inviting the judgment of God, sooner or later.

God did this to *protect His Word* and to protect the prophet of His Word. God doesn’t always do this but this time He did.

Elijah represents the authority of the Word of God. Ahaziah represents the authority and power of the government, a government out to stifle and silence the Word of God and its servants. No power, no authority, no ruler will ever be able to totally extinguish God’s Word. God will have the last Word and the last say on the last day.

A terrible judgment awaits all who resist, who stubbornly deny, who are defiant in the face of God. If God doesn't answer by fire now, one day He will.

**Isaiah 45:9** Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?

If God wanted to get your attention, what would it take?

If God stopped trying to get your attention, would you tremble?

Don't leave me in my sin.

Don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

God's judgment should still frighten us, to run toward Jesus.

### **II Kings 1:13-15, grace from God.**

The third captain was not like the first two, he showed respect and reverence for the office and the person of the prophet. Here we have another picture of grace and mercy in the OT. God is ready to spare the humble and repentant.

The third captain takes an entirely different approach. He casts himself on the mercy of God. He learns from the folly of the others. They serve as bad examples.

His response is a model for our response to God. This is the path of life. The way we prevail over God is by surrendering to God.

"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."

### **II Kings 1:16-18, God true to His Word.**

God gives Ahaziah a chance to hear the same sermon a second time. He gets a second chance at humbling himself and repenting of his sin and idolatry. It is glory and grace to hold out life to a dying sinner. His father showed remorse and humility when Elijah confronted him about his sin against Naboth.

As a Christian minister and as Christian witnesses, we can stand by every death bed and hold out hope to the dying until their last breath, while the day of grace lasts. Such are the riches of God's grace.

**II Kings 1:17** So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

If I and II Kings and indeed the whole Bible is about anything it's about God fulfilling His Word and keeping His promises and delivering on all His threats.

What God says, God does. Whatever He says you can take to the bank.

The passage ends with the conventional formula used for all the kings. Yet there is a difference here worth noting. The only story told of Ahaziah's reign is not about how he ruled or what he did, but how he died. He was a sad and stupid king who needed but did not seek the living God.

But remember the story and book is about God and not man. It is Him with whom we have to do. We can dismiss this as primitive religion or religion at its worst. Or we can come face to face with the living God who speaks and acts in our history and in our world and in our lives.

### **Conclusion and Application.**

We no longer worship bulls and Baals, but our hearts are idol factories and we house a pantheon of deities in our souls.

We can select from a cafeteria of idols approved by our tolerant, pluralistic society. We have idols that give us peace and security, that bring a sense of order to our lives and give us a sense of wholeness and meaning and well-being. Idols of money, sex, power, savings, jobs, positions, approval, sports, women, children, people, things.

It is a given we all have them, ask God to expose them, ask God to see if there be any sinful way in us and any sinful thing. Be about finding and exposing and tearing down your idols.

Consultation with Baalzebub can take many forms today. Astrology, horoscopes, palm reading, tea leaves, tarot cards, Ouija boards; or today scientific experts, medical experts, political analysts, marketing professionals, or however we trust and turn to besides God.

Just as we have our many Baalzebubs, so God has His many Elijah's, His many messengers ready to send to us at a moment's notice. Messengers today like our conscience, calamity, getting caught, personal suffering, disease, death. These can all be God's Elijah's to us.

This text is also cause for worship. It shows us the truth and reality of our situation.

Oh the grace of God that rescued me from His consuming fire.

Oh the grace of God that has snatched me from the fire, from willful disobedience, from resistance to the truth, from blindness to the glory of God, from hater for the things of God, from mocking and slander and derision.

Oh what praise and worship is due to God.