

## Watch Your Step – Lessons From Ahaziah

We've spent the last three weeks teaching from the New Testament writings of Paul. This morning I want to jump back to a story from the Old Testament. Turn with me to 2 Kings 1 and I want us to look at what is essentially the final miracle of the prophet Elijah, before he is caught up to heaven in a whirlwind.

I want to just read through this chapter and make some explanatory comments so you know the full story and then I want to point out three lessons we can learn from Ahaziah.

Commentary:

Moab is located in what is now modern day Jordan. The Moabites were descendants of Lot. Moab was his son by his own daughter (that made him Lot's son and grandson) if you recall that story and they were often enemies of Israel. They had been subjects of Israel but after Ahab was killed and his son Ahaziah became king, Moab rebelled against Israel and secured their freedom and Ahaziah had done nothing to quell the uprising and rebellion. The account of Moab's rebellion is told in 2 Kings 3 but it is mentioned here as part of Ahaziah's story.

Ahaziah lived in a palace in Samaria and excavations have proven it had a second story. He would die from injuries sustained when he fell through the lattice. It is believed this was a wooden screen that shielded the balcony and the king's bedroom, allowing air to flow but hiding the king from public gaze. He apparently took a wrong step or somehow fell against this lattice and plunged over the balcony and onto the grounds below.

Injured, he wasn't asking for healing, he just wanted to know if he was going to get well. Rather than asking of the Lord or seeking out the prophet of God and asking for prayer, he sends messengers to enquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron to see if he could get an answer. Baal-Zebub means "lord of the flies." This idol was considered to be the god of the underworld. Some thought it could deliver from plagues of flies and insects, hence the name. By the time of the New Testament the Jews were referring to Satan as Baal-Zebub

While the messengers were heading towards Ekron, the angel of the Lord spoke to the prophet Elijah and told him to go meet the messengers of the king, (referred to as the king of Samaria here) and ask, **"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'"** 2 Kings 1:3-4

The messengers didn't know who this guy was and Elijah didn't identify himself to them. But there must have been something dramatic and authoritative about the old prophet because instead of continuing on their mission, without hesitation the messengers turned around and went back to the king to report what the old man had said.

Verse 5 the King asked why they had come back so soon. They told him of their meeting and in verse 7 the King asked "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?" They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The Hebrew words actually translate as "an owner of hair" and the King James Version reads "he was an hairy man." This may refer to the hairy animal-skin garment cinched around his waist or that Elijah himself had long hair. When they described him, Ahaziah said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

You can't help but wonder if the times when Elijah had confronted Ahab and Jezebel, or when Elijah called down fire upon the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, if perhaps Ahab and Jezebel's young son Ahaziah might have been there and had seen and heard Elijah. It was perhaps an image burned into his memory. So when he heard this description, he knew it was Elijah, the old family nemesis. He then gave orders for a captain with a company of fifty men to go and capture the old prophet and bring him to the king. It sounds a little like over-kill doesn't it? Fifty soldiers to capture one old man?

Verse 9-10 tells us what happened. In what might have been a mocking fashion, the captain called to Elijah, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'" Elijah's response might indicate the captain doubted his credentials as a man of God, or had only disdain for God and his prophet. It's just a crazy old man up there on the hill. We don't need 50 soldiers to capture one old man. "Hey, man of God...come on down here." And Elijah says, "Since you doubt that God is in Israel and he is with me, if I really am a man of God, may fire fall down and consume you." And it happened. The bible says, "Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men."

This was repeated in verse 11, only this time the order was intensified: "This is what the king says, 'Come down at once!'" It sounds like the king has become a little more angry. "How dare you kill my men. Now come down at once!" Ahaziah was like his mother and father, he wanted what he wanted and he wanted it right now. He had no regard for the men he was

sending or for their lives. No remorse. No repentance. Not humbled by his fall and his life-threatening injury. Still arrogant, proud, demanding. “Do what I say and come down at once!” And again, fire falls and all the men are killed.

The king sent a third captain with his fifty men and this captain wisely cried out for mercy from Elijah. “Please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants.” The angel gave Elijah the okay to go with them and to speak to the king. So Elijah showed mercy to this captain and his fifty men.

Let me say a word about the violence of this story. It sounds so cruel doesn't it, that Elijah would call down fire on one hundred and two men and God would answer him? What about the God of mercy that we know? How could this be, that God would just burn up these men? We need to be careful that we not judge the past with the same standards of forgiveness and mercy that we have found through the cross of Christ. It was a violent time and it was a time when the holiness and justice and righteousness of God and his severity against sin stood out. Remember that throughout the Scripture there is a continuing revelation of the character and nature of God and it is finally revealed in fullness through the incarnation and the revelation of Christ. One of my favorite preachers from an earlier generation, F.B. Myer was born in London in the 1860's. Referring to this Old Testament period and what seems to be harsh judgments, he wrote, “There is nothing surprising here! It could not have been otherwise, in a gradual unfolding of the nature and character of God. The holy men who lived in those days had never heard the gentle voice of the Son of Man speaking the Sermon on the Mount. They had, however very definite conceptions of the righteousness and holiness of God, and his swift indignation on sin.”

If you look at Luke 9:51 there is an interesting little event that is recorded only here in Luke's gospel. NIV doesn't translate all of the passage as the KJV does, but after Jesus had come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. For some reason he took the road from the Galilee to Jerusalem and went through Samaria. As they came into one of the Samaritan villages, he sent messengers on ahead to see if they could spend the night there but the Samaritans would not allow him and his disciples to stay. I don't know if he was near the site where Elijah had called down fire, but it is possible he was. Perhaps that would explain why when they returned to Jesus and told him the people of the village wouldn't allow

them to stay there, James and John asked Jesus, **“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?” But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Luke 9:54-56.**

Elijah’s day was a different age and time in the revelation and working of God. But understand, we are not to ignore the important lessons of judgment we see here. We understand and are made aware of his great mercy exactly because we are made aware of his justice and his judgment against sin. Our sin. I can ask “Would you like to receive God’s mercy?” and you think, “Sure, why not. I mean, it sounds nice and all.” We don’t really understand God’s mercy until I can point out to you that you are a wicked sinner, guilty of rebelling against God and his commandments and because you have sinned and despised God in your heart, you are condemned to die and go to hell, forever and ever. You should have fire fall down from heaven and destroy you. And now, just before you fall into an eternal hell, I ask you again, “Would you like to receive God’s mercy?” And we have an entirely different answer. “Oh yes! Thanks God for his mercy on me!” So before we judge Elijah and the fire of God too severely, let that lesson of God’s judgment do its’ convicting, convincing work in your heart and life. Thank God that we can see the severity of the punishment of God upon sin and sinners so we can know the importance of turning to Christ in repentance and becoming glad recipients of his mercy and grace.

One last point about this, while we are not engaged in a Christianized jihad to overthrow wickedness, we aren’t calling down fire from heaven on sinners in our neighborhood, but we should be as zealous for God and for his glory and as zealous in our hatred against sin and ungodliness in our own life and in our world. We want the fire of God to consume the patterns of sin in our own heart and cleanse us. Let’s be zealous for God and his kingdom like Elijah was. These soldiers and their king were deliberately rejecting the God of Israel and pursuing another god, an idol, and Elijah was quick to stand up against something so abhorrent as the king pursuing idolatry.

So we’ve seen the judgment of God against these men but take notice that we’ve also seen God’s mercy. Because this last captain cried out for mercy and humbled himself before the prophet of God, God showed him and his men mercy. Elijah went with them and told the king

exactly what the Lord had said earlier. **“Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die! So he died, according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.” 2 Kings 1:16-17**

Now, with all that said, let me mention three lessons we learn from Ahaziah in this story before we close. **1. Watch your step! It matters where you walk.** It matters where you are going. It matters where you step. Ahaziah was just walking around on the second floor of the palace, likely in his bedroom, when without watching where he was going he fell through the lattice, fell off of the second story balcony and injured himself to such an extent that he would die as a result of his injuries.

Ahaziah wasn't a very cautious person. Some of us aren't either. We don't count the cost in terms of our eternal soul. Without regard to the consequences to us, our family, those we care about, without regard for God we just go right ahead looking to please ourselves. Like Ahaziah, we want what we want and we want it right now. Ahaziah couldn't be warned. He was the king. He didn't have to do what anyone told him to do. So he walked right on through the lattice and into God's judgment.

May I warn you today, some of you need to watch your step spiritually speaking. You need to watch who and what you are leaning on. You've decided that it doesn't matter what you do. You're mad and angry at someone or at God so you have thrown caution to the wind and you are just acting as you choose. Or you just don't think any of these things can happen to you. You're going to sow your wild oats while you can. Just having a little fun because you deserve it, because you want to. Watch where you step. You may be about to fall and you might not recover from your injuries. Ahaziah never got up from the bed after his fall.

Some of you are about to fall through the lattice. You are about to take the wrong step, to make the wrong move. Someone is about to leave your husband, to leave your wife and family, you're about to give into that temptation and walk away from living a godly life. You're about to do something you'll end up regretting the rest of your life and you'll never get off of that bed when you fall. Watch your step.

**2. Don't ignore your history!** Ahaziah should have known his family history. He should have learned from watching his mother and father call upon strange gods and build up

high places for idol worship and reject the God of Israel. He knew the trouble they encountered because of their wickedness and sin. He knew what had happened to his parents, how the word of Elijah had come to pass and the dogs licked up their blood. You can read about it in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Kings 9 and 10. He knew that Elijah had called down fire from heaven and had seen to the execution of the prophets of baal. He had witnessed it all. And as a result, he had to know there was a God in Israel that had all power and authority. He had seen everything prophesied concerning his family come to pass. He should have known to serve God. He should have known to call on God for healing and help, to have called for Elijah and asked him to pray for him. Ahaziah knew, but he ignored his history.

Some of you know your family history but you are ignoring it. You know what alcoholism did to your family, but you're going to go ahead and drink. In moderation you say, but you are ignoring your history. It's foolish to ignore the history when for the past three or four or five generations alcohol has wreaked havoc in your family.

You are ignoring your history. You know what has happened to others, but you think it won't happen to you and then you find yourself caught up in addiction, in immorality, in sin.

Some of you are ignoring your family history. You know the pain that was caused because someone committed adultery, you know the pain of divorce and how angry it made you when your parents divorced and now you are ignoring your history and you are going to go right ahead and make those choices that will lead you to divorce and to heartbreak in your own family. You're ignoring your history and you're about to cause your own children the same pain you endured when you were a child. Wake up. Watch your step. Stop ignoring your history!

Ahaziah should have said, "I know what my parents did and I remember how they suffered and how they died. It won't happen to me. I'm going to serve God and honor the lord, I'm going to obey him and his word and I won't ignore my history."

**3. Know who to call in times of trouble.** Ahaziah didn't watch where he was going. He fell through the lattice. He ignored his history and when he got in trouble, he turned to the god of Ekron, an idol, instead of calling upon the living God. When God allowed Elijah the prophet to cross his path, instead of seizing the opportunity to repent and call upon the prophet, he sent soldiers to capture him, no doubt to kill him in order to settle the old score for his parents. He refused to call upon the only one who could have helped him in his trouble. He called on

baalzebub and because he did, Elijah said you will never get up from this bed. You will surely die. And so he died.

You fall through the lattice, you find yourself in trouble and what do you do? You keep on trying to solve your problems doing the same things that got you into trouble. You keep going to the same friends who keep pulling you deeper and deeper into sin and bondage. You don't call on God, you just run from him and run from the church and run from godly counsel.

I don't know who this message is for, but someone, hear me say it again, you are about to fall through the lattice. Or maybe you've already fallen. If you have, there is only one thing to do. Call upon the living God of Israel. There is a God in Israel. There is a God in this place today. Ahaziah had to stay on that bed and die because he refused to call upon the Lord, to repent and ask for the Lord's help. But we know there is a God whom if we call upon him this morning, in his mercy he will tell us to take up our bed and walk. He will heal and forgive and cleanse. But you've got to know who to call upon in a time of trouble.

You don't have to die on that bed. Come to Jesus and let him save you and change your life. The choice is yours! Watch your step. Look where you are going. Look where you're headed. If you don't stop, you are going to fall through the lattice.

Stop ignoring your history. Open your eyes and admit the truth. And call upon the Lord. The bible says whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. It's your time. This is your moment.