

“A Consuming Fire”
2 Kings 1
(Preached at Trinity, November 14, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This evening we begin 2 Kings. Originally, 1 & 2 Kings were a single book, so it shouldn't seem strange that we pick up right where we left off in 1 Kings. Ahab is dead and his son, Ahaziah succeeded him.
 - A. **Verse 1** serves as a brief introduction to describe the political situation in Israel. The kingdom is as sick as the king. After the death of Ahab Moab rebels against Israel. The author immediately gives us a parenthesis that describes the brief reign of Ahab's son, Ahaziah, and then he describes Elisha succeeding Elijah after he is taken up in a whirlwind.
 - B. We won't pick back up with **Verse 1** until we get to **Chapter 3**
2 Kings 3:4-5 NAU - "Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and used to pay the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams.
⁵ But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel."
2. As we read of Ahaziah, Ahab's son, at the end of 1 Kings we discover that he was no better than his father:
1 Kings 22:52-53 NAU - "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 caused Israel to sin. ⁵³ So he served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done."
3. The hammer of God's judgment fell quickly upon Ahaziah as he fell through the roof of his palace.
 - A. It was common for kings in the ancient east to have upper chambers where they could rest during the heat of the day. The recent hurricane and power outage makes us appreciate the air conditioning of our day. Previous generations had to combat the heat. The chamber would have had wood slats or lattice for privacy while allowing any breeze to pass through. One commentator suggests it was a lattice window that opened outward that he might have leaned against and it gave way.¹
 - B. The text tells us he fell through the lattice and was severely wounded. With his life in jeopardy, he sent messengers to enquire if he would recover. Only, it wasn't God's prophets he sought. He sent them to enquire of Beelzebub, a Philistine deity. In what could be the last days of his life, he doesn't seek God but an idol. Isn't it amazing that even after the prophets of Baal were consumed under the wrath of God, this wicked king looks to a pagan god in his time of need.

¹ Cyril J. Barber, *The Books of Kings: The Righteousness of God Illustrated in the Lives of the People of Israel and Judah*, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 13.

4. God sent Elijah to intersect the path of Ahaziah's messengers and the message was bad news for Ahaziah. The First Commandment rang loud and clear, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."
- I. The first thing we find in this passage is the sure judgment of God upon sin. The wages of sin is death.
 - A. Ahaziah followed in the footsteps of his father, Ahab
 1. Ahab and his wife Jezebel had led Israel into gross idolatry and brought them under God's judgment.
 2. It wasn't only Israel that Ahab and Jezebel led into idolatry. They also led their children into wickedness.
 3. Ahaziah thought it a small thing to continue worshipping foreign gods. But he could not blame his parents. He was guilty for his own sin.
 - B. Ahaziah had a terrible accident
 1. We aren't given details. Only that he fell through the lattice of his upper chamber. It was looked upon as an "accident." Word may have spread among the people, "The king has been in an accident."
 2. But with God, there are no accidents. Only the working out of His divine providence. Nothing happens by chance.
 3. He fell and was badly injured. He may have had broken bones, perhaps a piece of wood impaled him. Perhaps he was being consumed by infection. All we know is that he was facing the distinct possibility of death.
 4. The main thing we need to see is this was no accident. He was suffering under God's perfect judgment. Sin has its consequences. Don't forget God's declaration of judgment upon the house of Ahab.
1 Kings 21:29 NAU - "I will not bring the evil in his days, *but* I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days."
 5. Some people live as if they completely avoid the consequences of their sins.
 - a. In fact, sometimes it even appears they are highly blessed.
Psalms 73:3-6 NAU - "For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. ⁵ They are not in trouble as *other* men, Nor are they plagued like mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them."
Psalms 73:12 NAU - "Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth."
 - b. The truth is, no one will escape the judgment of God. God's justice will prevail in the end.
Moses said it well:
Numbers 32:23 NAU - "be sure your sin will find you out."
And Nahum:
Nahum 1:2-3 NAU - "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished."

- II. What we read next is an affirmation of God's word spoken through the Apostle Paul.
Romans 3:10-12 NAS - "There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; ¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."
Romans 3:23 NAS - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
- A. Some might be troubled by what we read next.
1. Ahaziah sends one of the captains of his army with a division of fifty men to Elijah to call him to the presence of the king. In other words, they were sent to arrest Elijah.
Kings 1:9 NAU - "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" Elijah calls down fire from heaven and the entire regiment is consumed.
 2. One might assume these men were treated unjustly. They were simply following orders. Was it fair that their wives became widows and their children fatherless? Does this seem unjust and unfair.
 3. And then it happens again. A second captain and another fifty men approach Elijah with the same message, and again fire falls from heaven and consumes them.
- B. This wasn't a case of God consuming innocent men
1. These were soldiers accustomed to flexing their muscle.
 - a. You can sense a bit of arrogance as they command compliance from Elijah, "Come down!"
The tone was disrespectful towards God's prophet.
 - b. We also should understand the intent of their arrest of Elijah. Like Jezebel's intent to kill Elijah, Ahaziah was attempting to silence the Word of God by destroying God's prophet.
 2. Even if we dismiss personal involvement in Ahaziah's guilt they were certainly not guiltless. They were guilty sinners under God's just condemnation.
 - a. This is the fatal miscalculation of most men. They presume they are basically good people. They presume they deserve God's blessings and deserve eternity in heaven.
 - b. They fail to comprehend their utter wickedness and moral bankruptcy.
 - c. More important, most fail to comprehend the infinite holiness of God. God doesn't arbitrarily consume innocent men. He displays His perfect justice upon wicked men.
 3. It reminds us of the words of our Savior.
Luke 13:1-5 NAU - "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered this *fate*? ³ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

4. We hear echoes of Hebrews 12 -
Hebrews 12:28-29 NAU - "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire."
- a. Just as God answered the prophets of Baal by sending fire from heaven at the request of His prophet. Ahab didn't comprehend the fiery judgment of God, nor did Jezebel comprehend it. She only saw the need to dispose of Elijah.
 - b. Now Ahaziah fails to comprehend the judgment of God and desires to dispose of Elijah. It was actually God Ahaziah was seeking to remove and silence.
Once again God sends fire from heaven.
 - c. God's eternal judgment will be a display of fire – for God is a consuming fire.

III. The grace of repentance – **Verses 13-14**

- A. The third captain is sent forth
 1. We would expect to see this captain and his fifty consumed like the other two. He was just as worthy of death. And the captain knew it. It was likely the smoking corpses of the other 100 soldiers were still smoldering on the ground.
 2. We don't find him barking out orders to Elijah. He might have been a powerful soldier surrounded by fifty men of valor, but this meant absolutely nothing before God.
He came expecting just judgment and fell down before Elijah begging mercy.
2 Kings 1:13 NAU - "he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and begged him and said to him, "O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight."
 3. This soldier was spared.
- B. This is a wonderful picture of the Gospel
 1. We are justly condemned. Just as God will consume others for their wickedness, we know that we are just as wicked and just as guilty.
 2. We read that the wages of sin is death, and we have certainly deserve to receive full payment.
 3. We read that there are none righteous, and we know this includes us.
 4. We know there is nothing we can do. We can't rid ourselves of our wickedness and we can't earn God's favor.
 5. Some might take exception to fear as the motivation for coming to Christ. Fear is no substitute for faith. Fear alone will not change the sinner's heart. But many tremble before the fiery judgment of God – for our God is a consuming fire. Was this captain fearful? Yes, terrified. Yet, God used it to humble him.

John Newton:

*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

6. By God's grace we come bowing in full humility and submission seeking God's mercy.
Such mercy can only come through God's Savior, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

1. God commanded Elijah to boldly go before the king.
2 Kings 1:15 NAU - "The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king."
This is the message to all preachers of the Gospel. Preach the Word and do not fear the face of men. They may hate the Word and hate you for preaching it but you must preach it none the less.
2. So, Elijah goes before Ahaziah. His message had not changed.
2 Kings 1:16-17 NAU - "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 where you have gone up, but shall surely die.'" ¹⁷ So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD"
3. Ahaziah had the same problem as all of fallen humanity. He had a wicked heart. He made decisions consistent with his wicked heart.
 - A. The "therefore" in **Verse 16** implies that had Ahaziah sought God rather than the pagan god he would have been spared. We'll never know. Ahaziah was under God's judgment. There was no grace for him.
 - B. We also must not overlook that Ahaziah had time to repent. We don't know how long of was between Elijah's first words to the messengers of Ahaziah in **Verses 3-8** but it was time for Ahaziah to consider his wickedness and repent. It was time wasted and he perished in his sin.
4. Apart from grace, God's judgment will surely come. None will escape.
"For our God is a consuming fire."
5. We should not miss this important truth. God commands all men everywhere to repent. If they do not they will face God's fiery judgment.
"So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken"
The phrase, "According to the word of the LORD" is used 17 times in 1&2 Kings.