

## **ELIJAH'S LAST MISSION ON EARTH**

II Kings 1: 1-18 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Finally, today, we come to Elijah's last assignment before God took him Home to Glory in a whirlwind. We also get a description of Elijah's close and personal outward appearance. His reputation preceded him. Ahab and Jezebel's son, Ahaziah, knew exactly who the prophet was who intercepted his messengers who were headed to Ekron in Philistia. The messengers returned to king Ahaziah and told him about meeting a prophet. When they described him as wearing "a garment of hair, camel's hair, and wearing a belt of leather around his waist," Ahaziah knew immediately that the prophet was none other than Elijah, the Tishbite. Hundreds of years later, another prophet, the last of the Old Testament prophets, appeared as Messiah Jesus' forerunner, as we read of him in Matthew 3: 1-6. We read, "In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is He who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." The very last two verses of the Old Testament written by Malachi the prophet around 397 BC in Malachi 4: 5-6, were, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

In the northern kingdom of Israel, after Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice in 906 BC, now 10 years had transpired. It now was 896 BC. The triumph at Mount Carmel in 906 BC did not last very long in Israel. Until Jesus returns to this earth in His second coming, evil that is expunged, will always return in this world. Finally, at the second coming of Christ, the devil and all evil will be judged and put away forever. (Revelation 20: 10) Our text today in II Kings 1: 1-18, introduces Ahab's son, King Ahaziah, who was as wicked a king as any who ever reigned in Samaria, in the Northern Kingdom of the 10 tribes of Israel. Back in 1040 BC. 144 years earlier, in the reign of King David, David smote Moab and made the Moabite nation slaves to Israel. At that time, David extended the boundaries of Israel in all directions. David's judgment of the Moabite army was remarkably subduing to the Moabite nation. David made the soldiers lie down on the ground, and then measuring them by lines with a chord, he put every two lines of men to death and kept one line of men alive. (II Samuel 8: 2) The Moabites then had a yearly tribute to pay of the fleeces of 100,000 lambs and of 100,000 rams. (II

Kings 3: 4) After the death of King Ahab, Moab rebelled under a king named Mesha. King Ahaziah therefore lost much of Israel's revenue when Moab revolted and won their freedom by defeating Ahaziah. The Northern Kingdom's power began dying off under this evil and weak king Ahaziah. Ahab and Jezebel had two sons who ruled over Israel, Ahaziah and Jehoram, or Joram as he was called. Ahab and Jezebel also had 70 other sons—we read of in II Kings 10: 1. Ahaziah rebelled against the Lord, and he died after two short years of reigning in Israel, leaving behind no son—v. 17 of our text, so another of Ahab's sons, Ahaziah's brother, Jehoram—also known as Joram, reigned in his stead for twelve years. Jezebel, Jehoram's mother was alive and she lived many more years. Doubtless, Jezebel was the power behind the throne of Ahaziah as well as his brother Jehoram or Joram.

Our text today tells the amazing and shocking story of Elijah the Tishbite in his last divine call and assignment, as Elijah was called to prophesy judgment on evil King Ahaziah. II Kings 1 tells the story of the king's accident, how he fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself badly. This injury was an injury he would never recover from. It was not a battlefield wound Ahaziah suffered from as his father Ahab was shot in battle. Many of the Oriental houses, and palaces, had a cage-like chamber perched on top of the high wall that surrounded their house or palace. The purpose of this chamber was to be a lookout for the dwellers inside. It was a latticed chamber so dwellers in the house could look through the lattice down the streets without being observed. It was an unlikely misfortune for king Ahaziah, but God sovereignly allowed it to happen perhaps as an opportunity for the king to seek the Lord. Yet, Ahaziah never sought the Lord. Perhaps the accident happened as Ahaziah was coming down from the roof of his palace one day. He may have stopped to lean against the lattice of the chamber window or on the latticed balcony in that upper chamber. The lattice gave way under his weight, and the king was hurled into the courtyard and street below. He was so seriously injured that he spent the rest of his reign in bed, lying in pain and weakness. Ahaziah ultimately died of the injuries received in that lattice fall.

Today, God has led me by His Spirit to look carefully at the judgments of God that happened during Ahaziah's reign as his wickedness occasioned God calling Elijah the Tishbite to represent Him in his one last assignment before God took Elijah home to Glory! What are these five judgments that came to King Ahaziah and his 3 captains and 150 soldiers? Are we foolishly forgetting God's judgments?

**SOMETIMES, GOD JUDGES STRONGLY THOSE SEEKING HELP FROM IDOLS RATHER THAN SEEKING HELP FROM HIM, THE LORD**

(I.) Notice II Kings 1: 1-3. It is always foolish to seek help from other gods. Can

you imagine the king of Israel, deciding to get help from Baal, and since there were many Baals, from a certain Baal god in Philistia, in Ekron? This god was Baal-zebub. Baal was the false god that Jezebel brought into Israel. He was said to be lord of the sun, lord of the storms, the god of fertility. Baal was the god of many of the foreign nations surrounding Israel. The rest of this god's name is zebub, which means the buzzing of flies. Baal-zebub was the "lord of the flies." Ekron was one of the five major cities of the Philistine nation. It was located about 12 miles inland from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This lord of the flies, Baal-zebub was known also as the god who could predict the future. After his calamitous fall, king Ahaziah wanted to know if he would get better or if he was going to die of his injuries after falling through the lattice.

Stop for a moment and realize that all of us would like to know the future, or at least, we pray about it. Everyone seems to desire information about predicting the future. Corporations hire consultants and pay them millions to predict future business trends and what the future holds. Many investors in stocks have a certain guru they consult to make good stock picks. All of us at times wonder about our health like Ahaziah did. We want to know about the health of our spouse, or of our children. We want to know if our children are going to get married. We all want to know so much—and we even pray, "Lord, what do you want me to do in this situation." It isn't a sin to long to know about the future, and to pray, "Lord, show me the path ahead to take." Desiring to know the future is so human that most all of us think and pray about this often. The problem comes when we get desperate. I remember spending 2 and a half weeks going through tests at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota back in 1974. In the end, they acknowledged the A-strain flu—the Port Chalmers Flu I had survived. Eight men died from this flu where I lived in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois. The final doctor I spoke with at Mayo Clinic said we are giving you some medicine to deal with your symptoms, but we have no cure. As we drove out of town that day, my wife and I passed a big tent on the edge of town. It was a Buddhist tent. The sign read, "If Mayo Clinic couldn't help you, stop in here." We kept driving, but I know there must have been many people who turned to that false god, Buddha to seek medical help.

Seeking for answers is not evil, but God sometimes judges strongly those who seek advice, help, and consultation by going to false gods, idols, and Baal-zebubs as king Ahaziah did. Ahaziah's mistake wasn't wanting to know about his future, but his great mistake was going to the wrong place for help. Ahaziah sent his messengers to Ekron from Samaria. The distance was 65 to 70 miles, so it was at the least, a three day trip. As the messengers took off, God called Elijah to go on his last assignment for Him before taking him Home to Glory. Notice v. 3. The question Elijah gave the king's messengers to bring back to him was, "Is there no

Lord God Almighty in Israel? Are you serious? Are you actually going to consult the false god, Baalzebub, the lord of the flies? Elijah as usual, showed up in obedience to God, out of nowhere, it seemed, gave his message and disappeared. But the messengers were shocked and disconcerted, and their plans changed after they met this unknown prophet to them. He said, v. 4, “Go back and tell the king, “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.’” Then Elijah went—meaning as usual, he seemed to disappear into thin air. So back to king Ahaziah they went with one of the strongest judgments God could level the king with, from His prophet. This sometimes judgment fell also on Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament because they turned to and worshipped money rather than God. (Acts 5) 2ndly,

### **SOMETIMES, GOD JUDGES PERSONALLY THOSE DENYING HIS PRESENCE AND HIS ABILITY TO HELP THEM IN TIME OF NEED (II.)**

Notice more closely Elijah’s words to the messengers in verse 3 as well as the interchange between king Ahaziah and the messengers who returned without going down to Ekron we will look at in a moment in verses 5-8. Look again at Elijah’s words in verse 3. “Is it because there is no God in Israel, that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” Think of it. God the Holy Spirit can be grieved. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God takes it personally when we foolishly ignore, deny, or play down His presence and His ability to help us in time of need. This foolishness of this evil, wicked son of Ahab and Jezebel. He was a deplorably sinful king. Now give Ahaziah credit for wanting relief perhaps from the flies in Jezreel. Flies are the carriers of many diseases, and Ahaziah’s wounds from his fall from the upper deck of his palace to the street must have riddled him with wounds, sores, scrapes, broken bones and infection. To add to his affliction, he now must have been disturbed further by the unwelcome attention of Jezreel’s flies which swarmed around his sick bed. He did desire relief from those flies and want healing from his fall, but he acted as a mere pagan that denied the God of Israel. Ahaziah had seen with his own two eyes, that God did miracles by the hand of Elijah ten years earlier, as God ended the 3 and a half year drought and showed his power sending fire to consume the sacrifice—something Baal could not do. Ahaziah knew the prophets of Baal and Asherah had been slain, but he was as evil as his mother Jezebel. Ahaziah denied the very existence of God anywhere, including Israel. God took that personally in the judgment his servant Elijah prophesied.

Now the messengers didn’t know who the prophet was, but Ahaziah had no doubt. That prophet wearing camel hair and a belt of leather was the dread enemy of his deceased father, Ahab. There is no doubt Ahaziah remembered his mom’s promise to Elijah found in I Kings 19: 2, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also,

if I do not make your life as one of the prophets of Baal, by this time tomorrow. His mom and dad both failed to kill their enemy. Ahaziah had a plan—he hated the message of Elijah that he would die in his bed. So, if you hate the message, kill the messenger. He would capture, kill, and silence forever this threatening prophet. In fierce rage, as his mother Jezebel, Ahaziah sent out a captain and fifty soldiers to arrest Elijah. Before we move on, I ask you, “Isn’t it interesting how certain Ahaziah was that the dreaded message came from Elijah?” The world is watching us, beloved. They are paying attention to us. They know if we are authentic and genuine. They see us from a distance, and they draw conclusions about our faith, our integrity, our honesty, and thus about God. Ahaziah knew who God was and who His prophet Elijah was. Elijah’s judgment declaring Ahaziah would die on his sick bed is ample evidence that God pronounced a personal judgment on this king of Israel who acted as a practical atheist.

### **SOMETIMES, GOD JUDGES IMMEDIATELY THOSE PLACING THEIR WORD AND AUTHORITY OVER HIS WORD OR HIS PROMPTINGS**

(III.) Notice verses 9-12. Before I read this account, I want to begin by saying, God is not impressed by those who speak against his prophet who stood for Him. Many judge Elijah by what happened in the same area in Jesus’ day. The account is found in Luke 9: 51-56. Read it! Jesus was not rebuking Elijah’s actions in 896 BC, but James and John, the sons of thunder wanted to call down fire to consume the whole village in Samaria, perhaps it was Jezreel, where the villagers would not receive Jesus. Jesus words were sharp to James and John. Jesus rebuked them and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man came not to destroy people’s lives, but to save them.” Those who speak evil of Elijah’s actions remind me of Uzzah who was trying to protect the Ark of God when protection was not needed. He fell down dead when he touched the ark. It is not my intention today to try to protect God or His prophet as I report what happened to 102 men who died. Such an action takes me beyond my abilities, or beyond God’s call. I can only tell you what happened when God’s servant Elijah faced one captain and 50 soldiers who said, “O man of God, the king says, “Come down.” Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” It happened. This did not deter Ahaziah as he sent a second contingent and this captain with his fifty was more insistent. That man came up to Elijah where he was still seated on top of the hill. He said, “O man of God, this is the king’s order, ‘Come down quickly!’” Elijah answered him again by the fire of the Lord. Apparently, God had led Elijah to appear personally to Ahaziah. The first two captains would not have allowed that to happen. Had Elijah obeyed the king’s order, his life would have been taken. If he had refused to come down, the soldiers doubtless would have taken his life. Beloved, whatever God wants us to learn here, know from your shepherd that I see a warning for us

all. May we never like king Ahaziah place our word, our opinions, or our made up minds before God's authority, His Word, His will, or His promptings. Notice the second command was even stronger—we dare not tell God or His anointed servants what they must do based on our authority or our word. When we become immovable to follow God's authority, he will move us, judge us, and sometimes, it may be immediately that God moves us. Almost always, when we tell God or others what we will not do, watch out. God very well may move us. He may call us and bring us to say yes to His will. Like the old song, "God never compels us to go against our will, but He just makes us willing to go. In a battle of authority, God's words trump ours always. Moses said no to God over and over, but God refused to take Moses' no for an appropriate answer. Always place your word and your actions at the disposal of God. Never stand immovable to His leading. Fourthly,

**OFTENTIMES, GOD JUDGES MERCIFULLY THOSE HUMBLY ASKING FOR THEIR LIFE AND THOSE THEY LEAD TO BE PRECIOUS.** (IV.)

Notice the words and the actions of the third captain of 50 soldiers that Ahaziah sent in II Kings 1: 13-15a. Mercy itself implies some form of deserved judgment we deserve that God's righteous judgment chooses to deal with mercifully. Something about this captain was so different from the first two captains. He testified to Elijah that he knew about what happened to 102 men before he arrived. This man disobeyed the king, and fell on his knees and implored, intreated, and begged Elijah to let his life and the life of the fifty men he was leading be precious in his sight. This time God restrained Elijah from sending down fire. God did not withhold fire the first two times. This time the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with this captain; do not be afraid of him." These words from heaven tell the story of God's perspective on the matter. The first two captains and their soldiers would have killed Elijah. God had the same message he wanted hand-delivered by Elijah to Ahaziah. So now no fire fell. Elijah got up, arose, and went down with the captain and his soldiers to the king. God's mercy through Elijah reminds me of all the times God has shown mercy to me, and to you all. He has given us undeserved mercy and grace when we could have so easily become charred remains. Beloved, humble yourselves before God—do whatever it takes to show Him He alone is in charge, and you are not. Entreat Him, implore Him, and beg Him for mercy. 5thly,

**ALWAYS, GOD JUDGES FAITHFULLY THOSE WHO FULFILL HIS WORD, AND THE WORDS OF THOSE WHO TRULY SPEAK FOR HIM.**

(V.) Notice verses 15b-18. The third captain was humble. Rejection of God as his ultimate King would mean another fiery death. That captain had to reconsider his allegiances: God help us do the same. Ahaziah could arrest and execute him if he returned without Elijah. He took that risk. Ahaziah could do nothing to him or to Elijah without God's permission. So, the third captain delivered Elijah and brought

him before the king. Most people say “Experience is the best teacher.” That’s false. When the first two captains were struck by God’s fire, it was too late to learn from it. When a drunk driver kills others, that experience comes too late to save their lives. When a person takes their own life, it is too late to learn from it. God help us learn from others as this captain did. Paul taught this in Romans 15: 4. Now with the third captain beside him, Elijah hand delivered the message of the Lord. Elijah said, “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.” God is faithful to His Word. We read, in verse 17, “So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.” Remember as we close—If it is God’s Word, God’s will, God’s true prompting, and not something you or I have made up, if God has spoken to us or through us, He will be faithful to His Word. He cannot deny Himself. What’s going to happen today, tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year? None of us know. God knows. He knows the future. There is a God in Israel. There is a God who sent His Son to die for us. Though we don’t know what the future holds, we know He holds the future. Let’s trust Him. Let’s know His judgments, and let’s never forget how He always judges faithfully those who follow and fulfill His Word obediently. I close with the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 11: 33. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.” Amen.