

Reading: 1 Kings 22:51-2 Kings 1:18

Theme: Elijah's Last Task.

We are coming to the last recorded task Elijah was given by the Lord. In it we will see the battle proven prophet ready to serve his God no matter the consequences. Like the incident of Naboth's vineyard and Elijah's confrontation with Ahab, this incident is not an easy or pleasant one, but I pray it would be profitable for us to look at. I want to see 6 things from it:

1. Rebellion.

In v1 we read of Moab's rebellion against Israel - they had been subdued some 150 years previously by King David and ruled over by the Israelites all that time. On Ahab's death they rebelled and gained their independence from Ahaziah's rule, as it seemed he was powerless to do anything about it - a young man, a new king, untrained in battle etc. Yet it is not Moab's rebellion I want us to note. We started our reading in 1 Kings 22:51ff where we learn of Ahaziah's active rebellion against God. He knew all the Lord had inflicted on the land because of his father's evil ways, but he nevertheless deliberately kept on in those wicked ways. He also provoked the Lord as his father did, but did so knowing the divine sentence of judgement that was hanging over the family (21:21-24). He chose to keep on against God and His ways - active, wilful and deliberate rebellion against God! It was high treason against the King of heaven!

In the Hebrew there is no division between 1 and 2 Kings - they were one book and so the end of our 1 Kings would be read with 2 Kings following on straightaway and the reason is shown for Moab's rebellion - as a punishment, as a warning that God was not pleased with Ahaziah. AV says "*Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.*"

Ahaziah showed his dark and rebellious heart after his accident in the palace – which should have been the safest place for him! As he lay on his bed and thought on things, he was concerned for the future. Instead of being concerned to be ready to meet God, he wanted to know if he would recover - after all he was only a young man and so he decided to ask the god of Ekron - Baal-Zebub (Baal = is lord, God; Zebub = flies) i.e. lord of the flies. Scholars feel this god was also considered a god of healing and so he was not only sent to check out the future, but looked to Baal Zebub to heal him.

He rebelled in this action as he disobeyed God's word not to consult with such dark things about the future. Ahaziah was consulting with dark forces, satanic powers to know the future. God's word expressly forbids that - Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, Deuteronomy 18:9-12 (*after Ahaziah's time Isaiah 47:11-15, Jeremiah 10:1-5*). To do so was not only to disobey God, but to dishonour God and distrust God in His dealings with him. There may be some in the service who are deliberately ignoring God and His ways and toying, playing, dicing with the occult - Ouija boards, tarot cards, mediums, horoscopes and astrology, as well as many debatable new-age ideas and practices. God's warning in the Bible is that we are not to play about with them, not even as a joke, or at a party or as a laughable experience.

Ahaziah's enquiry sealed his fate, yet God had given him opportunity to look at his life and its frailty and this should have caused him to seek God while he was on his sick bed; even as he was afraid he would die. God granted him the breathing space to get right with God, yet Ahaziah didn't take it. We are not to assume that we will turn to God and our deathbed, or even in some crisis. We could be so hardened and deceived by sin and its influence upon us that God, being right with God, could be the last thing on our mind and heart and we could die in active or passive rebellion to God!

2. Roadblock.

The messengers headed off, but were stopped from going to Ekron, was some 45 to 50 miles south, south-east of Samaria, because they came across a roadblock - Elijah blocked their way and told them the message God had given him to tell. No doubt Elijah had been carrying on with his usual work - training up Elisha and establishing the companies of prophets. Yet as he was doing that, he had a remarkable communication from God. It was brought to him by "*the angel of the Lord*" which as I've said before is usually a term used to designate the Son of God before He was incarnate. The message he was given was one that showed that the Lord knew all things and He would punish the affront of this rebellious sin against Him.

We are to note that no one - high or low, rich or poor, famous or insignificant is ever out of the view of Almighty God. He sees and knows all things - not only our actions, but our desires, thoughts and imaginations. All we do or say is perfectly known to the Lord. One day all outside of Christ will be presented with this recorded evidence and have to give account before God! That is a serious thought! Are we ready to do so at this moment? Elijah's obedient meeting with the servants cause them to not only stop in their tracks, but such was the power of the message and even the messenger, that as soon as he had gone, the servants turned around and went back to Ahaziah and they delivered the message as they were told (v6).

3. Recognition.

The return journey between Samaria and Ekron was some 90 to 100 miles, which would have been 3 or 4 days journeying by foot. Ahaziah knew these messengers hadn't gone there and back so quickly and asked why they had returned. What a shock he must have had as they told the message they had received from the man

who had met them, who told them this word of the Lord to Ahaziah. It must've been an impressive and authoritative message Elijah had given them, for they risked their lives by returning to the king in a direct violation of his command to go to Ekron. Then they openly proclaimed what the man had told them - no watering it down and no apologies, but a remarkably faithful report of the message.

We need to be urgent, clear and faithful to the message of the word of God. We are not to speak peace when there is no peace; we are not to fawn over people or try to soothe them when we should be confronting them. If the Lord has said, then we need to say it also. Yet having said that, we are not to be rude and offensive, but are to use strong arguments softly spoken and it is to be our message and not our manner that is to cause the offence.

The messengers told Ahaziah what was said and immediately he wanted to know what the man looked like! He seemed to overlook the message and wanted to know what the messenger was like! One commentator says that the unsaved person will always concentrate on the messenger - their faults, failings, accent, the way they speak, or their clothes - in order to ignore the message from God - was Ahaziah doing that? The messengers described him and straightaway Elijah was recognised. I think Ahaziah had a good idea that it was him anyway, but this confirmed it. The pesky prophet who troubled his father was now troubling him! Sadly that was all Ahaziah saw and he failed to hear the voice of God speaking to him.

4. Reaction.

A captain with 50 of his men was sent out to get Elijah. Probably Ahaziah was furious and Elijah was going to suffer for his pronouncement. The king ignored the voice of God, the word of God and even though on his sick bed, he wanted Elijah brought to

him - or even, as some think, executed. At this point we can see the change in Elijah as he was not hiding away, but sat on top of a hill! The Lord had dealt with him and even as 50 and more soldiers come after him, he sat contentedly ready to serve the Lord!

By God's grace our weaknesses and past failings can be dealt with and we can be of use even in the situations we fell in before e.g. Peter - denied his Lord and run away, yet in later years he stood firm even to death; John Mark left Paul and Barnabas because of hardship and Paul would not take him on the 2nd missionary journey, but years later he wrote warmly of Mark and he wanted Mark brought to him because he was helpful to his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). We are not to think that a failure means the end for us and our service. Our God is the God who can restore, equip and use us again because He is a remarkably gracious God. Yet we are not to presume on His grace either and so abuse it by our thoughts, words and actions.

We read of the incident of the destruction of the first 2 captains and their men. What are we to make of these incidents? Ahaziah had sent to know an answer from Baal Zebub, but he had an answer from the Lord instead! I wonder what his reaction would have been if the same answer of his deathbed had come back from Ekron! Would he have sent troops to grab the priest, to threaten him or even to kill him? Yet because God had spoken through Elijah, Ahaziah sent the soldiers to him to probably get rid of him. The captains called to Elijah and called him "*Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'*" Scholars feel here that the phrase "*Man of God*" was used in a disrespectful way, as a derision, as an insult and that this was compounded by insisting that he obeyed an earthly king "*Come down*" (v9), "*Come down at once*" (v11).

This disrespect was shown to Elijah and to the word of God that came through him. The king felt he had the supreme authority and

could do what he wanted, yet he would be shown that the Lord was both omniscient (*knows all things*), but also omnipotent (*all-powerful*). To the Lord these forces were nothing. Realise God's glory was at stake there, for they derided the God of Elijah, so he, no doubt with the divine warrant and permission, called fire down from heaven and the troops were all destroyed. I find it staggering that Ahaziah, though he knew what happened, yet he sent, in his sin blinded rage and fury, a 2nd set of troops and their captain to Elijah, and even after they were destroyed he sent a 3rd captain and troops! We are to realise how blind and hard sin can make us as people. Do not imagine a disaster, hard times will soften our or people's hearts to the gospel or to God. Sometimes, in fact most often times, we learn we and people become hardened and bitter in sin and can slander God even more and may even curse Him! Be careful we are not like that!

5. Respect.

The 3rd captain was sent and he had respect, reverential respect and fear of who Elijah was and he humbly asked for mercy on his life and the life of his men. He knew he couldn't do anything against Elijah, for Elijah was under the divine protection of heaven and so he pleaded for mercy. He doesn't tell Elijah about going down, about the king, but he was concerned for his life and the life of his men. We are to realise God's actions in history can cause some to be concerned about important and eternal issues. It has been said that God speaks to us in the everyday events of life, but in disasters HE SHOUTS AT US! What will it take for someone here to listen to the Lord?

The angel of the Lord spoke again to Elijah and then, only then would Elijah go to the palace. Elijah had learned his lesson well - trust and obey the Lord and His word. He has no qualms about going with the soldiers into the very palace of Samaria, where there was not only the angry king, but probably his still angry mother

Jezebel! Now he does not run away, but has a confidence and trust in the Lord God who he had come to know and know even better than previously when he stood on Mount Carmel.

Elijah entered the lion's den and, like Daniel some 3 centuries later, he found they were powerless to harm him. Most often the safekeeping and help of our God in situations show us that our fears were not only unfounded, but we were foolish to worry, and in fact we feared our fears and imagination more! So often we find grace to help in time of need and we find our God is faithful to His word yet again! We can almost be surprised, shocked, when we should be surprised and shocked at our little faith, doubts and fears! Elijah went in and out of the palace in perfect safety. His earthly life was not going to end in the palace, but on the other side of Jordan in God's time and incredible way, but that is for next time...

6. Result.

Elijah boldly declared the same clear message to Ahaziah - and drove home the foolishness of not seeking the Lord and that the consequence of doing that was that Ahaziah had signed his own death warrant. It must've been an awful message for Ahaziah to hear as he lay on his sickbed - that it would become his deathbed! He was a young man, with wealth, fame, power and yet he heard he was going to die, but from his bed he would go straight to hell. That was the reality, the result of his seeking advice and help from this false god, this demon and using an occult practice to find out his future.

Where are we looking to concerning our own futures? We should listen to the words and warnings of Scripture, of God in His word and we are not to consult dark powers concerning the future. I repeat again that we are not to play about with the occult even if they term themselves "white" or not. It dishonours God and it exposes us to unseen spiritual dangers. We are not to be concerned

to know the future in all its details. We are to be concerned to know the God who holds the future, our future in His hands and this God calls on us to trust Him with not only our eternal souls, but all the circumstances of our life. He knows what He has ahead for you and me and whatever we go into, He will be there to help and strengthen us. He can be trusted. We are not to use or to look to things He has forbidden. In fact God tells us not to be anxious, overly anxious about the future. He will be there with us and He will work all things together for good to those who love Him who are called according to His purpose. **Remind ourselves!**

Concerning our future, we need to make sure that it is eternally secure - that we will have a home in heaven when the day of our death comes. This comes about when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we will have a home prepared and reserved for us in heaven, have an inheritance that can never fade, spoil or perish and no matter what events occur in our life, whether our lives are short or long, for heaven is guaranteed as ours as is His care all the days of our lives. Ahaziah had no concern for this; he died and was eternally lost. Our lives are so fleeting, no matter how short or long they are and eternity is so long! I urge us all to be secure for eternity and have the peace of knowing that we are in safe hands in our life and that our futures are in the hands of our God and Saviour.