

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

VOLUME 3

APRIL 8, 2018

ISSUE 41

“IS IT BECAUSE THERE IS NO GOD IN ISRAEL?”

By Andrew Dow

1 & 2 Kings record the decline of Israel. At first the people, led by Solomon, constructed a Temple while living in peace and prosperity. By the end, however, both halves of the divided nation were captives in a foreign land. Amid this story Elijah repeatedly calls Israel to repent. In 2 Kings 1 we find Elijah’s final encounter with a king of Israel.

The Story of Ahaziah and Elijah

Our story begins by describing that Ahaziah, the king of Israel, **“became ill”** (2 Kings 1:1–2a). As a result Ahaziah sent to **“inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover”** (2 Kings 1:2b). Why did Ahaziah inquire of Baal-zebul? I have no doubt that Ahaziah was aware of the true God of Israel. Elijah spoke forcefully about God to Ahaziah’s father, Ahab. Surely he was aware of the contest on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). When Ahaziah needed the Lord the most, he acted like God wasn’t there. Instead, he sent messengers to inquire of a false god.

As the story continues, Elijah is instructed by an angel of the Lord to intercept the king’s messengers and give them a message for Ahaziah: **“Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron? ... you shall surely die”** (2 Kings 1:3–4). I can only imagine what was going through Ahaziah’s head as he listened to this message. He

expected a message from Baal-zebub telling him everything would be just fine. What he received was a message from the Lord telling him nothing could be worse.

At this point, the story takes a strange twist. We're told that Ahaziah **“sent to [Elijah] a captain of fifty with his fifty ... and he said to him, ‘O man of God, the kings says, “Come down””**” (2 Kings 1:9). Instead of politely coming down to see Ahaziah or sending word back, Elijah declared, **“If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty”** (2 Kings 1:10a). The instant Elijah spoke **“fire came down from heaven and consumed”** them all (2 Kings 1:10b). This odd scene repeats itself in verses 11–12.

Why is all of this happening? Why is Elijah striking people down, and why is Ahaziah sending more? Remember Elijah's initial message to Ahaziah: **“Is it because there is not a God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?”** (2 Kings 1:3, 6). Elijah's purpose here—and throughout his work as a prophet—was to show the people that there was a God in Israel, and that they needed to listen to Him! Ahaziah just didn't get it. After the first group is put to death, he sends another group telling Elijah to **“come down quickly”** (2 Kings 1:11). Ahaziah was trying to ignore the true God of Israel, and it wasn't working.

After the first two groups were sent to summon Elijah, Ahaziah **“again sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty”** (2 Kings 1:13). We might expect to see more fire from heaven. But this captain acted differently: **“The third captain of fifty ... 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...” (2 Kings 1:13-15). The angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to go with this humble captain, **“So he arose and went down with him to the king”** (2 Kings 1:15).

The story ends with Elijah standing before the bed-ridden king. 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 where you have gone up, but shall surely die”** (2 Kings 1:16). The story of Ahaziah’s life closes with this statement: **“So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken”** (2 Kings 1:17).

Lessons from the Text

The story of Ahaziah and Elijah may seem obscure, but I think that there are some lessons from this story that we can apply to our lives. Consider two points:

First, do we ever act like God isn’t there? Remember, Ahaziah was in a situation to know the true God, but instead he inquired of a lifeless idol. Even when he was confronted with the fact that his men had been struck with fire from heaven he still refused to accept the truth of God’s power. Do we ever try to act like God doesn’t exist? Sure, we’re content to sit in our nice church building and we enjoy the camaraderie of church fellowship, but what about when it comes to life changing decisions? What about when we are forced to decide between following God and following the world? Inquiring of the Lord will not always give us the answers we want to hear, but inquiring of the world will always result in death.

Second, are we showing those around us that there is a God? Remember, Elijah’s goal in dealing with Ahaziah was to show him that there was a God in Israel! Unlike Elijah, we don’t have the ability to use miraculous signs, but we all have a responsibility to show people that there is a God! How do we go about accomplishing this task? (1) We do this by teaching people when the opportunity arises. If we truly believe there is a God in heaven, we will boldly stand **“to give a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you”** (1 Pet 3:15). After all, what can man do to harm us (Matt 10:28)? (2) We also show people there is a God by the way we live our lives. If we dress, talk, or act like the world there will be nothing noteworthy about us. When people observe your life, they should be able to very clearly see Christ living in you (Gal 2:20)!

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:
Is Hell Real?

PM LESSON:
Why Did Jesus Fold His Clothes?

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)