

God Holds the Future in His Hand

2 Kings 1

We're going to study a story from the life of Elijah and for the life of me, I do not understand why so many people didn't even know this story.

A lot of you are not going to know until today that this story is even in the Bible – lots of people brush right over it, but I think it's one of the most important stories in his life.

Ahab is out of the scene – we saw last week he was judged by God and killed in war just as God announced because of his sin of stealing the vineyard of Naboth, but just because Ahab is gone doesn't mean Elijah's work is done, because Ahab has a wicked son by the name of Ahaziah.

So the good news is – Ahab dies. The bad news – Ahab Jr. follows him.

It's the ordinariness of this scene that is striking – it is the kind of thing that occurs every day. Accidents happen. People get hurt, often badly.

But the story is not really about Ahaziah's bruises and broken bones. It's his immediate response to the accident that gets the story going.

Verses 1-4 - After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. Because of the idolatries of the family of Ahab, the Lord diminishes the power of Israel's king. Therefore, we have a power and peace downgrade with Ahaziah. "The kingdom is just as sick as the king; the dynasty is dying" (Leithart).

²Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself.

It's interesting that 2 Kings doesn't start with a king wounded in battle (that's the way 1 Kings ends) – no, here you have a bit of clumsiness.

A typical Middle Eastern balcony had a lattice around it. It was great for letting the breeze blow through. It was great for comfort. However, it was very bad for security. It's just lightweight wood. And so Ahaziah fell through it. And he got injured.

And so in his injury, he turns to God. But he turns to the wrong god.

Isn't it interesting how, when people get sick, they get suddenly religious? When we get hurt, when we're suffering, suddenly, we cry out to God. And we should.

But we shouldn't cry out to God only when we're sick, right?

And sometimes, I wonder if when the Lord hasn't heard from us for a while, he says, "Hey, man, I haven't heard from you in a month. Great to hear from you. How you been?"

And this would have been an opportunity for him to turn to the true God of Israel. But he doesn't.

But the story is not Ahaziah's bruises and broken bones. It's his immediate response to the accident that gets the story going.

So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury."

So the name is interesting. If he had been named Baal zebul – would have means “prince Baal.” But Baal zebub means – Lord of the flies. Perhaps the statue of the god looked like a fly. In the NT, it carries with it the idea of misery-making and torment, bringing to mind an image of our modern-day mosquito.

So the King of Israel, in his time of need, turns to Baal – Lord of the flies. to do that he has to send messengers to Ekron. Really?



Ekron was a town about 40 miles to the SW of Samaria, belonging to of all people, the Philistines. (So this was in a different part of the world).

So the king of Israel, look for help in his time of need, to the Philistines (which would be a bit like David asking help from Goliath (if you could even picture that).

And so, down in one of the chief gods that was worshipped was a fly. Crazy, right?

So the God of Ekron was known all over that part of the world as being skilled in divination and predicting the future. And in ancient times, here's what they would do - they would give the idol a sacrifice, and the flies would hover over the meat, and the flies (people thought) represented the spirits and the demons. And Baal-zebub was the prince of demons – he's the one that could make these flies (or spirits) go away that were causing your illness.

(This is the only time he appears in the OT).

But he appears 7x in the NT. You may remember when Jesus is casting out demons to show that the Kingdom of God has come, and what do his critics say, “Oh sure, he can cast our demons. Because

he's calling on Baal-zebub to send them away.” And Jesus says, “You better be careful with that. Just like Ahab, you are being willfully blind to the work of God and giving credit to the devil for what God is doing – and you don't want to go there. It's called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.” And so Baal-zebub in the NT is another word for Satan himself.

Baal-zebub means “Lord of the flies”

But it's interesting – that people will worship all sorts of crazy things when they reject the true God.

I think it's true of all of us – how we handle our worst moment tells a lot about who we are at the core. Recently one of our men said in a Bible class, “What's in the sponge comes out in the squeeze.”

What does what we do, in times of sickness, reveal about our faith?

It's amazing at the kinds of things people resort to once they have forsaken the true and living God.

And then, they're open to anything, any kind of deception. So I was always taught that the natural world abhors a vacuum. (I also believe the supernatural world abhors a vacuum.) And when God is taken away suddenly, you need something to put in his place.

And you'll believe in anything, and you'll be open to a lie.

So they're worshiping the lord of the flies -- a bug. He turns to a fly to see if he'll get better.

Well, God's about to pull out the fly swatter. Look at verse 3. (Ahaziah sends his messengers to Ekron to see if he will recover).

³ But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’

Elijah shows up out of nowhere and says, “What could possibly explain this bizarre expedition of yours to the land of the Philistines to consult Baal? Is it because you think the God in Israel is no longer here? Really?”

Because he’s got two really good reasons to turn his heart back to the God of Israel. There is the whole story of the drought that he had lived through as a boy. There is the story of the fire on Mt Carmel – and if he didn’t witness it, he had certainly heard about it.

And somewhere in his confused mind I’m sure he could still hear the voice of Elijah – who could forget it – “If the Lord is God, follow him. If Baal, follow him. The God who answers by fire, he is God.”

You see, he knew those stories. There was clear evidence who the true God was. But instead of receiving a message from God, he decides to send a message to the devil.

And so Elijah asks them a question – “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you’re going to inquire of Baal? Really? Don’t you remember?

⁴ Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’” So Elijah went.

So the word on the street is, “He fell off the patio.” By the way – I think whole ordeal may have been God trying to get his attention. Because if God says you’re going down, he can get you with an arrow (like Ahab), or the banana peel (like Ahaziah).

God is interested in the heart of Ahaziah. But sadly, his appeal to Baal-Zebub was proof that his soul was in worse shape than his fractured body.

Verses 5-12

⁵ When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, “Why have you come back?”

⁶ “A man came to meet us,” they replied. “And he said to us, ‘Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, “This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’”” (It’s interesting that these messengers didn’t know who they ran in to. Maybe the great Elijah had become an obscure figure again).

⁷ The king asked them, “What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?” (He’s shocked to see his messenger back so soon).

⁸ They replied, “He had a garment of hair (literally “he was a hairy man” or “a man of hair”) and had a leather belt around his waist.”

The king said, “That was Elijah the Tishbite.” (Ahaziah shows himself to be more concerned about the man than the message).

⁹ Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “Man of God, the king says, ‘Come down!’”

Now, what could he possibly have had in mind? Did he think he was going to take Elijah out? Why would you need 50 men to do that? Unless, of course, you were thinking about Mt Carmel.

But then, what would you be thinking 50 soldiers could do?

But here's Ahaziah – and here was his intention -

"It isn't like the 50 are headed toward him because they want to bring him down to play golf with Ahaziah.

You don't send 50 men to Elijah because you want him to speak at the national prayer breakfast, you send 50 men because you want to silence him.

And so what Ahaziah wants to do is eliminate Elijah's testimony, by eliminating Elijah.

¹⁰ Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

And so, what happens when you don't get the point of fire? Sometimes you get more fire. And that's what happens here.

¹¹ At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says, 'Come down at once!'"

You notice anything? This captain is more coercive – "come down at once!"

The first captain of 50 asks, the second captain of 50 demands.

So there's 100 men down. But I just want to give you a little FYI.

You wouldn't get this just by reading it in the English text. But in the Hebrew language in which this text is written, there's a play on words.

In Hebrew, the word for **man** is the word - *eesh*. The word for **fire** in the Hebrew is – *ish*.

So the captain is saying is, "*Eesh* of God, come down."

When in reality, the *ish* of God came down.

That's the play on words in the Hebrew. It's pretty plain. And it's just there to make the impact, this play on words.

And so we read on and see - the man of God did not come down, but the fire did.

¹² "If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men. (Things were really beginning to heat up – and through extreme, we see God protecting his prophet from the intentions of these men).

Verses 13-18

¹³ So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men.

(By the way – the sure sign of madness is doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome. We've all heard that, right?)

And just based on that, how would you describe Ahaziah? He's Defiant, obstinate – you can come up with your own adjectives, but certainly he had little regard for the lives of his troops – which gives some insight into him, isn't it? He simply refused to face the truth.

However, the third captain had more sense than his king – verse 13

This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. "Man of God," he begged, "please have respect for my life and the lives

of these fifty men, your servants! ¹⁴ See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!”

He's a smart man. He saw what happened. Two strikes have already happened. He's the third guy at bat. Game over if he strikes out.

So he just humbles himself. Please, I'm a family man. I've got mouths to feed at home. Spare the lives of these 50 servants.

And so the third man did the only sensible thing in view of the righteous wrath of God – beg for grace.

And so one man did the right thing – he pled for mercy!

And what's his posture? He fell on his knees.

And so – he knelt, he pled, he trembled – AND – he lived! (And in addition – not only does he live – but his men do as well). Something Ahaziah never cared about – was those he commanded.

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

¹⁶ He told the king, “This is what the LORD says: 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!” ¹⁷ So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.

Sadly, the writer recounts not how the king ruled, but how he died.

“Everything he did was weak, faithless, and miserable; he achieved nothing, but ruin and failure. He let Moab rebel. He hurt himself in a clumsy accident. He foolishly attempted to use military force against Elijah. And worse, he sought help in the wrong place – in Philistia at the altar of a pagan god” (Russell Dilday).

What a story! Now is there anything we can take away? And I give you two things that stand out for me.

1. You’ve got to stay away from counterfeit gods.

Now, I believe Satan’s greatest victory in the Western world is to convince us we’re too intelligent to believe in it.

The demonic realm is real, and there are certain arenas that give wide open access for demons to affect us.

Ahaziah consulted the demonic to try to determine his future -- something the Bible strongly warns against.

Let no one be found among you . . . practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord . . . (Deut. 18:10–12).

Listen, to consult ANY OTHER SOURCE for guidance for your life, is an insult to the majesty of God.

It is demonically poison. And this may be an area that you’re never heard taught on, but God says:

Astrology is demonic. The Bible is full of condemnation of astrology. Palm readers – crystals – consulting the dead – fortune tellers – all these things are real doors that God wants kept closed.

Why on earth would you play with what you know can be deadly?

1 Timothy 4:1 - “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Demons use modern days idols to do their teaching, but behind it are demons.

2 Thess 2:9 says that Satan specializes in counterfeit miracles and signs to deceive the God’s people.

But – here’s why we should be concerned. (And I think it’s a consequence of the fact, that we’ve just not taught on this subject as we ought).

One of our Shepherds shared with me last week – a recent article from the Pew Research Center (May 21, 2025).

Title: **30% of Americans Consult Astrology, Tarot Cards or Fortune Tellers** (and they do so at least once a year).

And a lot of people say they do this for fun, but not everyone – with a number of them saying they do it for insight into determining their future. (Sounds a lot like Ahaziah to me).

- Younger adults, and especially younger women, are more likely to believe in astrology and to consult horoscopes. 43% of women ages 18-49 say they believe in astrology.
- Religiously affiliated Americans and religiously unaffiliated Americans are equally likely to believe in astrology (27% and 28%, respectively).

- Women are about twice as likely as men to believe in astrology and horoscopes. (37% of women say they do this at least once a year).
- Nearly a quarter of Americans ages 18-29 say they consult tarot cards at least annually.
- Religious differences in consulting a fortune teller are not very pronounced.

In Acts 16 they had this girl that was a slave and they were making money on here because she could predict the future. She really could. How could she do that? She had a demon.

(So when you consult a fortune teller, you’re consulting a demon that’s behind it all to get confirmation of your future. You’re saying, “God’s not telling me what I want to know, let’s go on a trip over to Ekron.”)

Which is the second point – do people still go to Ekron?

It’s what we do when we don’t want to be obedient, we just go out of town – we go to Ekron – to spend the day, spend the night, spend the weekend, in disobedience.

(On a flight to Maimi, when we landed, I saw young adults so excited about the weekend in Miami beach. When I returned to the airport, flying back home with many of those same students – I noticed how miserable they looked from the weekend). I wondered what regret they were living with. Because a demon will always – always – wreck your life! Every single time.

This young girl in Acts – what did she need? She needed deliverance.

But the scriptures are clear about the dangers of consulting the demonic world:

Galatians 5:20 says that idolatry and witchcraft are a work of the flesh.

It's interesting, that the Greek word translated witchcraft or sorcery in our English texts is the word *pharmakia*, from which we get our English word pharmacy, referring to drugs. The use of drugs for sensational, mind-expanding experience is a form of sorcery. Drug experimentation is a fleshly sin which leads on into deeper bondage with Satan's kingdom."

Revelation 21:8 says, "Idolaters and those who practice magic arts will be thrown into the lake of fire." The outcome is the same – fire for Ahaziah, and fire for those who even today worship demons.

Practice	Biblical View	Key References
Consulting mediums/spiritists	Forbidden	Deut. 18:10–12; Lev. 19:31
Necromancy (speaking with the dead)	Forbidden	Deut. 18:11; 1 Sam. 28
Fortune-telling / divination	Forbidden	Isa. 8:19; Acts 16:16–18
Sorcery / witchcraft	Condemned as sin	Gal. 5:20; Rev. 21:8

The Bible is not silent about this. From Genesis to Revelation, God draws a clear line:

Do not consult spirits — consult Me.

So what are you doing, if you're doing that kind of thing to figure out your future?

God's already told you about your future. (And here's what I want you to see that's so encouraging – because he knows the future, he holds the future in his hands, and he wants you to draw close not to demons, but to Him):

1. God's already given us hope and a future.

- **Jeremiah 29:11** – *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*
- **Isaiah 41:10** – *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

2. God gives us Comfort in Times of Trouble

- **Psalms 23:4** – *"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*
- **Romans 8:28** – *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

3. God gives us the Hope of Eternal Life

- **John 14:1-3** – *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you."*

4. God gives us Strength for Daily Life

- **Philippians 4:6-7** – *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*
- **Isaiah 40:31** – *“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

So – we’ve got to stay away from demonic forces and put our hope in God.

But here’s the last thing

2. **There’s no sin that is too far from the grace of God.** (Besides Elijah, there’s one person who really is the model for us in our story – and who is it? It’s the 3rd messenger is our model – who trembled before God, got on his knees, and asked for mercy. And the beautiful thing is: it was granted).

So about 3 years ago, we were studying this in a Bible class. And there was a young lady in the group who has a background of drug use and tremendous brokenness. And of all stories, she said this story helped her think about her life, and she wanted to be baptized, but what has always held her back was she didn’t think she could get everything clear of her habits.

She said, “I always knew I would drink again, I would smoke again, I would say a curse word again.” She was just really hard on herself.

And when class was over, one of the men in our group spoke to her (and I was so moved by it, at the time I wrote it down). He said, “_____, I want to ask you to do something. Stop talking about yourself so negatively. Everything you say about yourself is so negative. There are so many positives about you, so believe that.

And I want you to know – in heaven, there will be some people there who smoke, and there will be some people there who say some curse words. So understand - that this is a journey you’re beginning, and you will get better at some of these things as you begin your journey with the Holy Spirit.”

Afterwards she was so encouraged. And she gave her life to Christ and was baptized Sunday morning.”

Listen - God has given us everything we need for guidance.

He has given us the holy scriptures – he has given us the church full of people with spirit-given wisdom, he has given us his own holy spirit to indwell us and prompt us and lead us.

Why do we need to go anywhere else?

We’re going to sing. If you would like to be baptized, come. All over the world where they take spirits seriously, they take baptism more seriously. You know why? Because they understand that baptism is a clear break from the hold of the spirit world into the kingdom of God.

That’s what happens -you contact the blood of Christ, and that deliverance is offered.

I Surrender All