

A Futile Battle with God

2 Kings 1:9-18; Matthew 7:21

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The sceptic looks at this passage and condemns Elijah and the God of Elijah as cruel and heartless in sending fire upon these captains and their soldiers; after all they were just doing the bidding of the king that sent them. The wicked believe there could never be a just reason for the Most High God to consume these soldiers with fire (or judge anyone else).

Be not deceived, my friend, King Ahaziah and these captains hated Elijah and his God, and sought to silence the word of the Lord and to destroy the prophet (just as the wicked seek to do today). There is nothing new under the sun.

But what the Holy Spirit would have you to see is that here was a futile battle that the ungodly actually thought they could win against Almighty God. But as will always be the case, the wicked of this world and Satan deceive themselves. They are fools, for they can no more prevail against our God than Ahaziah could do so in the text before us today. The main points are the following: (1) Ahaziah Seeks to Silence the God of Elijah, but Cannot Prevail (2 Kings 1:9-12); (2) There Is None like the God of Israel (2 Kings 1:13-18).

I. Ahaziah Seeks to Silence the God of Elijah, but Cannot Prevail (2 Kings 1:9-12).

A. The Lord God was provoked to holy anger against the unrepentant abomination of King Ahaziah's idolatry (1 Kings 22:53).

1. As we have seen, the Lord revealed His holy anger by raising up Moab to rebel against Ahaziah, by bringing upon Ahaziah a fall and a disease (that soon led to his death), and by giving Ahaziah over to greater blindness in seeking help from the false god of Ekron, Baal-zebul.

2. But as if Ahaziah had not already sufficiently provoked to holy anger the one true living God, he in effect puts his fingers in his ears when Elijah confronts Ahaziah's messengers who were on their way to seek answers from a false god rather than from the true God of Israel, and Ahaziah aggressively seeks to silence the word of the Lord through Elijah. Ahaziah falsely imagines that he can prevail against the God who demonstrated His power on Mt. Carmel and showed the impotence of Baal before all to see. He believes he can be successful in contending with the Lord God where his father, Ahab, had failed to do so.

3. How the wicked show their willful stubbornness in fighting a battle they cannot win against the Lord God who cannot lose. This is the deceptiveness of sin in thinking we can continue to repeat the same unrepentant sin and rebellion against God and that the results will ultimately turn to our favor. To the contrary, the more you continue down that unrepentant path, the more the Most High God will make clear that you cannot contend against the Most High God and win. It is vain. It is folly. It is a hopeless battle. Learn here from the folly of Ahaziah and rather fall in faith upon the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and stop fighting against Him who is Lord and Savior of even the chief of sinners.

B. Ahaziah first sends a captain with 50 soldiers in tow (2 Kings 1:9). Two questions come to our mind at this point.

1. First, why so many soldiers? Whereas Ahaziah had simply sent "messengers" (who were intercepted by Elijah) to Ekron to inquire of the false god, Baal-zebul, as to whether he would live or die from the disease, Ahaziah now sends a captain with 50 soldiers to bring Elijah to him. These soldiers are not simply messengers. This is a power play on the part of Ahaziah (as with Jesus and perhaps some fear). He is threatening Elijah (and the God of Elijah). He is at war with the Lord God.

2. Second, what was Ahaziah's intent in seeking to capture Elijah? Well certainly it was not

to have a friendly chat with him over dinner. Ahaziah was angry with the word of the Lord through Elijah that he would not get up from his bed but would die from this disease. Ahaziah was not about to accept that message of God's judgment, and so he hauls God's messenger, Elijah, before him to threaten him, to bribe him, and if necessary to destroy him in order to silence him. Remember this is the son of Ahab and Jezebel. His intentions were evil.

C. But now our attention turns to the threat of the first captain who approaches Elijah as he sits on the precipice of a hill: "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down" (2 Kings 1:9).

1. Here this captain lays out the two opposing forces in this war and whose side he is on. He is on the side of the idolatrous king (Ahaziah). Elijah is on the side of the King over all kings (Jehovah). This is not a simple request or invitation, but a command that is smeared with irreverent provocations against the Lord. For when the captain refers to Elijah as "Thou man of God" it is not out of respect, but with derision, mocking Elijah (and especially Elijah's God). This command implies that Elijah and Elijah's God were Ahaziah's servants. Ahaziah has rejected God's truth that he is called to be the minister of God for good (Romans 13:4). His authority is not absolute, but he (as is true of all rulers) is under God's absolute authority. Therefore, when magistrates rule in rebellion against the Lord and His holy commandments, they (like Ahaziah) will know the righteous judgment of the Lord (whether sooner or later).

a. This is the solemn truth for which the faithful have stood throughout history (Daniel 3:17-18; John 19:11; Acts 5:29). If there was one central and unifying truth for which faithful Covenanters in Scotland, England, and Ireland firmly stood, it was the supremacy of God and His Moral Law over the king and the supremacy of Jesus Christ over His Church (the divine right of kings). Faithful Covenanters then and now decry all usurpation by rulers and arrogating to themselves the supreme authority of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Covenanters were exorbitantly fined, property and homes were confiscated; they were imprisoned, shot on the spot, drowned, and publicly hanged. Why? Because they refused to proclaim the absolute supremacy of the king over church and state. The battle lines were clear to these few, and so must they be to us (in standing against all violations of God's absolute supremacy in church and state).

b. This captain mocks God, but the Lord sits in the heavens and laughs at his impudence, rebellion, and mockery. This is not a battle that this captain can win, nor can we if we treat the Lord with scorn and irreverence. Elijah answers the captain in the words that we find in 2 Kings 1:10. Elijah is defending his call from the Lord to be His prophet, but ultimately he is defending the honor, glory, and almighty power of the God who sent him. If God has sent me, let His fire fall.

c. This is an issue of lordship for the captain and for Elijah. Is Ahaziah or Jehovah lord? The same battle is fought every day in your life and mine. Who is lord over your family, over your job, over what you watch, to what you listen, to what you read, with whom you hang out, for what you use your money—you or Jehovah?

d. A man of God (in a general sense) is one who professes and lives his life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, whose chief end and delight is God, and (in a special sense) is one who has a special calling from God to serve Him. In my judgment, I can think of no greater honor than to be called a man of God. Would you shun to be called "a man of God" because it is not politically correct, not cool, and that it would isolate you and make you the scorn and ridicule of family, friends, and co-workers? Elijah and many others of God's faithful servants were honored by the Holy Spirit when called "a man of God". What about you, husband, father, or son? Do you want to be a man of God, or a man of the world, a man of pleasure, a man of success, a man of knowledge, or a man of power? It is a question of lordship. Who is lord of your life (Luke 6:46)? Who are you living for?

2. God confirmed that Elijah was His servant and prophet (a man of God in the narrow sense) and that He was the one, true, living God by sending fire to consume the captain and his men on the spot. God may use other means of temporal judgment as we saw last week and may delay His judgment for a

time. This points to God's just judgment that will befall all of those who will not come to Christ and will be judged for their sin and rebellion against the Lord in the Lake of Fire.

D. The same judgment befalls the next captain of 50 (2 Kings 1:11-12).

1. What willful stubbornness in Ahaziah against the Lord to send another captain and 50 more soldiers to face the same judgment (his supremacy was challenged and it was more important for him to save face than to put all these people under the same judgment of God). Men, when retaining our authority in the home, workplace, church, or nation is more important to us than caring for the needs of those under us, then that power has gone to our head. Though we are called to be leaders, without sacrificial love that is seen, it is nothing (1 Corinthians 13).

2. This captain further aggravates the sin of the previous captain when he adds to the command of the king "quickly". The king is growing impatient and the captain likewise, but what they are forgetting is that the King of kings is growing impatient with their haughtiness and flaunting their "power" over Elijah and Elijah's God. There certainly is every reason to obey quickly all lawful commands of those in leadership, but not when that leadership has usurped the place of God (in family, workplace, church, or state). That is a time to disobey, not obey, even if there is suffering that follows (1 Peter 4:12-16).

3. Once again fire from heaven consumes them for their mockery, irreverence, and pretense to supremacy over God. The corpses are lining up on the battlefield, and yet Ahaziah will not surrender.

II. There Is None like the God of Israel (2 Kings 1:13-18).

A. Ahaziah sends a third captain with his 50 soldiers, but we note a completely different attitude in this man—one of humility and reverence for Elijah and the God of Elijah (2 Kings 1:13-14). He fell upon the mercy of Elijah and Elijah's God. Rather than exalting the king's supremacy, he acknowledged the supreme power of Jehovah in having burnt up the former captains and their men.

1. This is the picture of all who would be saved and rescued from that eternal Lake of Fire. Salvation is of the Lord. None will escape God's judgment that clings to his own supremacy and lordship. The Lord Jesus did not die and bear the wrath of God for His elect that they might continue to be lord of their own lives. The salvation of the Lord is not you bargaining with God over how much control you will exercise in your life and how much control you will give over to Him. You are not only forgiven all your sin and imputed Christ's righteousness, but your redemption in Christ reconciles you to God so that your battle with Him legally comes to an end. That is what reconciliation means--there is now peace. The real war begins against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. That being the case, why then do you find yourself fighting against the Lord, His will, and His providence, rather than against the lusts of the flesh and your own selfish ambitions? The Lord is not your enemy if you are a child of God. He is your King who conquers and restrains all His and your enemies through His death and resurrection.

B. Not only does the Lord mercifully spare the life of this captain and his 50 men, but "the angel of the LORD" tells Elijah to go with the captain and to deliver the word of the Lord to Ahaziah in person (2 Kings 1:15-16). Even with Ahaziah knowing what God had done on Mt. Carmel through Elijah, and with Ahaziah knowing what God had done with his own father, Ahab, through Micaiah, and now with these captains and their men who were consumed with fire because of their impudence, irreverence, and scorn of Elijah and Elijah's God who had sent him, Ahaziah will still not believe in the one, true, living God. God's judgment in death fell upon him for his rebellion (2 Kings 1:17-18).

1. Dear ones, you do not have to mock God in order to demonstrate unbelief in your life. Your unrepentant disobedience and unwillingness to submit yourself to His absolute lordship reveals the

unbelief in your life. This will be the case of many on that last day (Matthew 7:21). Every Christian struggles against sin and temptation, but that is the point, they struggle, they war, they battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. They do not jump over the battle lines to join the enemy to fight against God's commandments, against the gospel, against the doctrine and worship of Jesus Christ.

2. Dear ones, your life is not about you getting what you want. It's not about God giving you what you want. As a Christian, your life is about glorifying Jesus Christ—reflecting His glory. It's about serving Him rather than Him serving you, taking up His cross, denying yourself, and following Him. The joy of the Lord vanishes when it is about you and me. The joy of the Lord is your strength when it is all about Jesus Christ.

3. Perhaps someone is thinking, "If I were Ahaziah, I would have heeded the word of the Lord through Elijah, but I haven't seen such mighty acts by God." The children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt by ten amazing plagues, and God opened the Red Sea for their deliverance while destroying the Egyptians, and sent manna from heaven and quail to eat and water from a rock, and they believed not. Listen, my friend, there is not a more mighty act of God than Christ's death and resurrection. The Sanhedrin knew what had happened because the Roman soldiers told them, and yet they would not believe. If you will not believe the gospel preached to you today, you would not believe if you knew what Ahaziah knew or what Israel saw. Cast yourself upon the mercy of the Lord in Christ Jesus. Receive God's forgiveness, and Christ's righteousness. Confess Jesus Christ to be lord of your life, and you will be saved.

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