

The Sins of the Son

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

6 of 7 in the Elijah series: *Truth and Life*

August 29, 2010

©2010 Scott L. Engle

2 Kings 1:1-18 (NRSV)

After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

²Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, “Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.” ³But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?’” ⁴Now therefore thus says the LORD, ‘You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.’” So Elijah went.

⁵The messengers returned to the king, who said to them, “Why have you returned?” ⁶They answered him, “There came a man to meet us, who said to us, ‘Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him: Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but shall surely die.’” ⁷He said to them, “What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?” ⁸They answered him, “A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.” He said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.”

⁹Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “O man of God, the king says, ‘Come down.’” ¹⁰But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

¹¹Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. He went up and said to him, “O man of God, this is the king’s order: Come down quickly!” ¹²But Elijah answered them, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

¹³Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. So the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated him, “O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight.” ¹⁴Look, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight.” ¹⁵Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So he set out and went down with him to the king, ¹⁶and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: 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 leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.”

¹⁷So he died according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. His brother, Jehoram succeeded him as king in the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son. ¹⁸Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

The questions are simple. To whom should we pray? Where do we turn when we need to be rescued? Who gives life and who has the right to take it away? Elijah tried to teach the father the answer to those questions. Now, he must confront the son.

While Elijah proclaims God’s word to Ahab and the people of Israel, the wars between the Israelites and their neighbors continued. God had picked quite the locale for the Promised Land. Canaan was like an ancient highway interchange, the place where the great empires had to come to get at one another. When Egypt wanted to push north, they had to go through Israel. When the Assyrians wanted to push on Egypt, the battleground was Canaan and, thus, the Israelites. In addition, lesser kingdoms such as the coastal peoples of Phoenicia and Philistine lay on Israel’s western flank. The kingdom of Aram lay to the northeast and Moab to the southeast. In all, the Israelites,

were in an almost constant state of war. Rare was the time when they weren't fighting someone.

1 Kings 20 is a good example. It is sandwiched between the stories of Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19) and Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Ahab isn't named in the account of this particular military campaign, just the "king of Israel." A king named Ben-hadad has put together an alliance and come to besiege Israel's capital city of Samaria.¹ He is defeated, by the power of God, and captured. Against God's wishes, the king of Israel, presumably Ahab, lets Ben-hadad go.

The death of Ahab

Then after the story of Naboth, the writer of the book of the Kings takes us back to the wars. In the days of Elijah, the nation of Aram, to the northeast, was the main problem. Though there has been peace for three years, Ahab, the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, agree to make war on Aram in order to regain the border city of Ramoth-Gilead.

The two kings consult their army of prophets who are nothing but "yes men," telling the kings that they will surely prevail. But one prophet, Micaiah, is found who will tell them the truth when pressed. The two kings will fail and Ahab will be killed in battle. Micaiah gets sent to prison for his honesty.

Fearing his death on the battlefield, Ahab removes every clothing item that might mark him out as something special during the battle. He knew Ben-hadad and his army would be looking for him. Despite Ahab's ruse, an arrow finds its way to him and he is killed.

Yes, Ahab dies that day. His body was brought back to Samaria in his chariot. After he was buried, his chariot was washed. As prophesied by Elijah (1 Kings 21:19), the blood streaming away from the chariot was licked up by dogs, just as Naboth's blood had been after his murder.

Like father, like son

Ahab is succeeded by his son, Ahaziah, whose mother is Jezebel. You can probably guess how Ahaziah turned out. He is just as bad a king as his father was:

He reigned two years over Israel. He did what was evil in the sight of the lord, and walked in the way of his father and mother, and in the way of Jeroboam² son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He served Baal and worshipped him; he provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done. (1 Kings 22:51b-53).

Elijah tied the top of his pack. He was ready to go.

In the middle of the night, an angel had arrived to tell him of yet another disturbing turn of events. It seems that Ahaziah had been careless again; he had a reputation for clumsiness. This time, he'd suffered a bad fall in his own chambers and had been forced into bed rest. He was seriously injured, the angel had said.

¹Remember, there are two Israelite kingdoms at this time: Israel in the north, with its capital at Samaria, and Judah in the south, with its capital in Jerusalem.

²Jeroboam was the first king of the northern nation, Israel, having precipitated the secession of the ten northern Israelite tribes. His embrace of pagan gods resulted in his becoming the paradigm of the evil king in the book of Kings.

Elijah had not been at all surprised by what the angel revealed next. Ahaziah had turned to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, in prayer, asking whether he would recover from his injuries.

Good grief, Elijah had sighed. What a family. The king of Israel turning to Baal-zebub rather than the LORD God? Would the affronts never end? How did Israel ever get so many foolish and wicked kings? As with Ahab, such idol worship could not stand.

Elijah's assignment was to intercept some messengers that the injured king had sent to the prophets of Baal-zebub. Elijah was to have the messengers convey a message to Ahaziah: because he had turned to a pagan god, he would not recover. Instead, he would die in that bed, only two years after succeeding his father.

Elijah hoisted his pack across his shoulder and headed out into the peaceful darkness of the hour before dawn.

On the road, Elijah eventually met those messengers; he supposed that God had been guiding his steps. In any event, the men stood in front of him. In the simplest terms (for the king's messengers were always a bit slow), Elijah told them that Ahaziah had turned to a pagan god for help, and, hence, there would be no help. The king would die. The LORD God had commanded it.

The messengers stood slack-jawed for a moment and then headed back to the king. They dreaded delivering bad news. It was the quickest possible path to early retirement . . . retirement from living!

When the messengers got back to the palace, they told the king what had happened. Much to their relief, he hadn't gotten mad, he'd just grimly asked them what this man had looked like. When they told him that he was hairy and wore a leather belt, the king had replied with one word: "Elijah."

Ahaziah quickly ordered in one of his commanders and told him to send a company of fifty armed soldiers to bring Elijah to him. The king would rather have simply "eliminated" the problem, but that was likely to create a firestorm among the people.

In short order, word came back that all fifty had been consumed by a fire from the heavens called down by Elijah when they had confronted him.

So Ahaziah sent another fifty. Same thing. Elijah was as formidable an opponent as ever, Ahaziah sighed to himself.

So Ahaziah sent a *third* fifty. He was going to run out of men to send if this kept up much longer.

At first things looked up for Ahaziah. The captain of the third company walked through the doorway into the bed chamber. He reported that the prophet claimed an angel had told him to spare the third company and come to Ahaziah. The scuttlebutt was that the captain, knowing the fate of the first two groups, had debased himself and begged for mercy. Ahaziah would deal with such weakness later. For now, he was glad that Elijah had done as he wanted.

But that changed in a moment. Elijah walked into the room, sauntered directly to the king resting in his bed, and told him that he would never leave the bed. If the king expected some figment-of-his-imagination pagan god to rescue him, he'd be disappointed. Death, not rescue, was Ahaziah's immediate future.

Elijah whirled and stormed out of the room.

And Ahaziah died.

The giver, and taker, of life

The story of Elijah and Ahaziah is not complicated. Its point seems to be pretty straightforward. Ahaziah has turned to a false god to save his life. And he learns the hard way that it is only the LORD God who can give life. And it is the LORD God who can take it away.

In his commentary on this passage, Choon Leong-Seow,³ reminds us of a couple of Jesus' disciples who needed to learn this lesson (Luke 9:54-55).

Jesus and some of his disciples were traveling through Samaria and were not being well-received. In fact, Jesus was pretty well getting rejected by the Samaritans.⁴ James and John are incensed by this and ask Jesus if he wants them to "command fire to come down from heaven and consume them" – just like Elijah. They even echo Elijah's words from 2 Kings 1. But Jesus rebuked them and on they went. It is the Lord who gives life and can take it away. The Lord alone.

The question posed here is a question for us as well. Do we truly embrace the LORD God as the giver of life and the one who is to take it away? To what "false gods" do we turn when we are in need of rescue? To whom do we pray? Do we truly believe that someone is on the other side of the line? Do we believe that this someone, God, will and can truly help?

**Scott's 11:00 Sunday class in Festival Hall
Beginning September 12:**

The Bible and the Qur'an: Side by Side

How much do you really know about the Qur'an? For most of us, the answer is not much. In this series, we'll be looking at the treatment of important biblical subjects, such as Adam and Jesus, from the perspective of both the Bible and the Qur'an. We'll begin with a brief introduction to the Qur'an. This promises to be one of our most interesting and timely series in a while.

Through Sept. 5: Books of the Apocrypha

Also: every Tuesday, a lunchtime brownbag in-depth Bible study with Scott Engle from 11:45 – 1:00, Room 127.

Just drop in when you can!

We are studying Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Beginning Monday evening, September 20 (6:45-8:30)
Scott's evening Bible study for the fall

The Book of Daniel

Daniel, one of the most misused books in the Bible, asks the question, "Who's in charge here?" The reader is taken on a journey from despair to hope, traveling through some well-known Sunday School stories and imaginative visions of God's triumph. Join us as we examine the handwriting on the wall (one those famous stories) and meet the Son of Man. This eight-week study will challenge your heart, your intellect, and your imagination.

To register go to www.scottengle.org and click on the Bible Academy registration link or call Kate Huber at 214-291-8021.

³*The New Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1999.

⁴In Jesus' day, Samaria was not Jewish. They were seen by the Jews as, in a way, traitors to the Lord God and were much despised by the Jews. Samaria was the area between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south.