

Playing With Fire

II Kings 1

Introduction

Bernie May of Wycliffe Bible Translators, spends a lot of time with languages. May wrote recently, about the way we play with words and constantly change them. She writes,

This has not been a good year for the American language. In Maryland, welfare applicants no longer meet with clerks; now they check in with eligibility technicians. Bill collectors are now called credit analysts; tour guides are destination advisers, and cemeteries now advertise pre-need arrangements. Just about the time I'd figured out that a revenue enhancement actually meant a tax hike, they've changed the term to tax base erosion control. And things are getting worse! Imagine, bathroom plungers are no longer called bathroom plungers. The new phrase, devised by a company which makes them, is hydroforce blast cup. When I read that, I immediately spotted a potential crises. Instead of hollering, "Quick, get the plunger"; I'd get all confused and by the time I hollered, "Quick get the hydro blast, forcing cup, plunger thing" - it'd be too late.

May continues,

Rolls Royce in England, unwilling to admit their cars ever break down like all the cars driven by the rest of us, do admit that occasionally their cars do fail to proceed.

Why is there all of this cover-up? Is it because we live in an age where people do not want to face truth? Is it easier to create a whole new language than

to admit death is death, failure is failure, and sin is sin? The truth may be too painful to look "square in the face".

Well, my friends, the problem of facing up to the truth has never been easy for any of us. The truth hurts! But the fact remains, the truth does not hurt unless it ought to! If it does and is ignored, you are inviting destruction; you are playing with fire.

As the book of II Kings opens, the very first chapter is nothing less than an illustration of the truth. To ignore the Word of God is to invite destruction.

The Reign and Ruin of King Ahaziah

The illustration comes in the form of a young king who has just ascended the throne of Israel. He is Ahab's son, and his name is Ahaziah.

Let us read the opening words of the prophet Jeremiah's inspired account. Look at verses 1 through 2a.

Now Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. And Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber which was in Samaria and became ill. . . .

Severe "invitations" to seek after God

Now, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, will rule only two years. Yet, in those two years, it seems that he had every opportunity to need and to serve the living God.

While Jeremiah writes in brief, to-the-point phrases, there are volumes in just the first two sentences. Two very traumatic events occur in

Ahaziah's life. They are events that should have pointed him to the Lord God of Israel.

Moab rebelled

1. First, Moab rebelled.

You need to understand that the Moabites had been a powerful enemy of Israel until the time of the judges. The book of Judges tells us the story of Ehud, the left-handed judge who delivered the people of God from the tyranny of the Moabites. From that point until the death of Ahab, the Moabites paid tribute to Israel and, generally, kept out of harm's way.

Chapter 3 of II Kings is merely the detailed story of Moab's rebellion. Notice the interaction between Ahaziah and Elisha in II Kings, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14.

Now Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the Lord has called these three kings together to give them into the hand of Moab." Elisha said, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you."

These are strong words. In other words, "Ahaziah, why don't you just go ask the prophets of Baal what to do?"

"We called for you, Elisha."

"Well, Ahaziah, son of Ahab, if it were not for Jehoshaphat, who loves the Lord God, I wouldn't spend one minute looking at your sorry face."

Why did Elisha talk to him like that? Go back to the last few verses of I Kings, chapter 22, for a brief biographical statement concerning Ahaziah. Look at verses 51 through 53.

Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. He did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. So he served Baal and worshipped him and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger . . .

Ahaziah is not very bright! You would think, if anyone would follow God, it would be the son who grew up to see his father and mother self-destruct. It was young Ahaziah who saw the three year famine. He was there as well, to see the fire fall and the prophets of Baal put to death. Surely Ahaziah would say, "If there is anything I have learned, it is not to do what my father did!"

Yet, he was as wicked as his father, if not more so.

Ahaziah sustained a personal injury

2. The second traumatic thing that happened to young Ahaziah was that he sustained a personal injury which would ultimately, claim his life.

Remember that verse 2 of II Kings, chapter 1, tells us that,

. . . Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber . . .

The people in Israel did not sit on their front porch, they sat on their roofs. The roofs were flat and had steps leading up to them. The roof area was usually the combination of a storage place and a family room, where the cool breezes could be enjoyed.

The outer edges of the roofs of the more expensive homes would offer an added protection. This would be in the form of latticework placed around the edge of the roof. The palace roof would be much higher than that of an ordinary Jewish home.

Ahaziah was evidently, leaning against the latticework that adorned his summer palace. The lattice must have suddenly given way, causing the king to plunge to the earth. It must have thrown everyone into a state of panic. Ahaziah's injuries were so serious that he was taken to his bed, where he was confined. Perhaps he was partially paralyzed from the fall.

Moab has rebelled and the security of Ahaziah's nation is at risk. Even though chapter 3 of II Kings informs us that the Moabites were defeated, the battle only temporarily ceased. Then, the king becomes perhaps, paralyzed, or at least, to ill to get out of bed. "Ahaziah, it's time to seek the Lord."

Look at the last part of verse 2 of II Kings, chapter 1.

. . . So he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of

Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.”

Inquire of whom? Baal-zebul.

The softening of a rebellious heart does not automatically occur in traumatic times. Perhaps you have seen that happen in your own life or in that of a relative. Something happens and you immediately think, “Good, that will bring them to the end of themselves and they will repent and follow God.”

That will not necessarily happen. With some, it will harden their hearts even more. And, that is the case with Ahaziah.

Now, Baal-zebul literally means, “Lord of flies”. The only time the name appears in the Bible is in chapter 1 of II Kings. Do not mistake it for the New Testament name Beelzebul, which means, “Lord of the earth”.

While both Baals have their roots in Satan, Baal-zebul’s name suggested that he was a god who warded off plagues that were brought on by flies. Some believe the idols of this particular branch of Baalism would have been in the form of a common fly.

Ahaziah sends a delegation to the shrine at Ekron to ask for some sign from Baal-zebul, the Lord of the flies. He is asking, “What does my future hold?”

Continue to verse 3.

But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Arise, go up 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-zebul, the god of Ekron?’”

By the way, that question will be repeated three times in chapter 1. Skip to the middle part of verse 6.

. . . Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron? . . .

Also look at the middle part of verse 16.

. . . Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron – is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? . . .

The King of Israel is doing nothing less than rejecting the God of Israel. He is violating the Word of God by going after other spirit world resources.

Severe warnings not to seek after other “gods”

All of us would like to have some clue of the future; some tangible insight into the unseen world. It is a desire that is as old as Eve in the garden, who was lured with the promise of knowing as God knows.

Satan was at work then and he is at work today. He is thousands of years smarter and more experienced today, however. If all forms of spiritism were shams, God would not have so clearly warned us and forbidden our natural curiosity to follow its desires.

Let me show you how clearly God warns us against this. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 18, which contains a classic list of forbidden practices. These are practices that have largely captured the American mind. Begin at verse 9.

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.

Continue to verse 10, where the list of forbidden practices begins.

Child sacrifice – killing a child in a god’s honor in order to appease the god, or gods, to gain an answer or blessing from that god

Look at the first part of verse 10.

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire . . .

This was the practice of child sacrifice. The child was killed in a god’s honor in order to appease the god, or gods, to gain an answer or blessing from that god. In fact, in II Kings, chapter 3, verse 27, we are told that, as the king of Moab begins to lose the battle against Israel, he sacrificed his oldest son to his god as a plea for help.

Now granted, America is not sacrificing children in order to understand the future, but thirty one million unborn babies have been killed so they would not disrupt the future.

In fact, recently the Dutch courts dropped a murder charge against a doctor who was accused of killing a severely deformed newborn baby. That legal precedent has now opened the door to what they defined as a “mercy killing”; that is, ending the life of someone who is unable to ask for death, like an infant; a child who would surely not want to live?!

Divination – discerning the will of the spirit world

Continue in verse 10 for the next forbidden practice.

There shall not be found among you . . . one who uses divination . . .

The Hebrew word for divination refers to someone who could divine or discern the will of the spirit world. The same word appears in Ezekiel, chapter 21, verse 21, referring to the practice of whirling arrows in a quiver and deciding the answer to a question by the first arrow thrown out of the quiver.

Witchcraft – practicing magic by incantations

Verse 10 continues with the next practice.

. . . or one who practices witchcraft . . .

This is practicing magic by incantations.

Interpreting omens – the supposed ability to tell the future by watching natural phenomena

Continue reading verse 10.

. . . or one who interprets omens . . .

This is someone who supposedly is able to tell the future by watching birds, fire, rain and other natural phenomena.

Sorcery – the cutting and brewing of herbs for magical purposes

Look at the last part of verse 10.

. . . or a sorcerer

This word comes from the Hebrew verb “kasap,” which means, “to cut up”. It referred to someone who cut up herbs and brewed them for magical purposes. In the *Septuagint*, the word is “pharmaka,” which gives us the word “pharmacy”. Now, I am not suggesting that pharmacists are sorcerers who mix up their brew. This forbidden practice actually involved drugs to create religious trances and moods. Aristotle, and other ancient Greek writers, used the word “pharmakeia” as a synonym for witchcraft and black magic, because drugs were so commonly used in the practice. The practice of using drugs to reach altered states is popular even today.

It is interesting that this particular practice of utilizing drugs for religious highs will be a prominent

practice during the tribulation, when the Antichrist exercises his power. Revelation, chapter 9, verses 20 and 21, talk about the majority of people who,

. . . did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons . . . and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries [“pharmakeia”]. . .

In other words, they did not stop their use of drugs to reach some kind of union with their demonic gods.

Casting of spells – the casting of magic spells on others

The beginning of verse 11 of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, tells us that God also forbids,

. . . one who casts a spell . . .

This could be translated “one who is a charmer” or “one who ties the knot”. This referred to a person who supposedly cast magic spells on others.

By the time of Jesus Christ, Ephesus was rampant with this practice. In Acts, chapter 19, verse 18, we read that,

Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

The word “practices” in this verse, is “praxis” in the Greek, which is a technical term for magical spells. Continue to verse 19.

And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them . . . and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Imagine that period of time! Wow, what a bonfire!

Now, the next three things mentioned, in this list of forbidden practices, have to do with those who consult the spirit world or inquire of spirits. This was Ahaziah’s specific form of rebellion. The reason I am taking the time to explain all of this is because the practices exist today. Even the Christian can naively, foolishly flirt or experiment with certain forms.

Medium – one who consults the spirit world or inquires of spirits

Look at the middle of verse 11.

... *a medium* ...

Medium comes from the Hebrew word “ob,” which literally means, “speaking from within a person”. It can also be rendered, “twittering, whispering”. In other words, God forbids anyone to open themselves up to any spirit being or presence.

Listen to what a British author penned a hundred years ago.

We live in an age of divination. It is useless to deny it. This revival of pagan superstition would neither deserve mention were it not for the hold it is taking of the popular mind, especially in the United States, where we are amazed that a nation, so acute and quick-sighted in most other matters, should be juggled out of the truth of their English Bibles by tappings upon tables. Away with your mediums, their bandaged eyes and pencilled messages, hands waving in the air, and all the dark arts . . . God is His own interpreter; do not go to shrines at Ekron nor at Boston.

Before I left for Japan, I shopped for some games for the missionaries there to have and enjoy. I was surprised to see stacks of OUIJA boards for sale, and as a game no less. It might interest you to know that the makers of OUIJA went to court in 1920, claiming tax exempt status for the sale of their boards. They argued in court that the OUIJA board was not a game, but a “form of amateur mediumship” and was therefore, not taxable. They lost and it is still being sold as a game.

My friend, if you have an OUIJA board, get rid of it. If you read the tarot cards for fun, throw them away. If you consult the horoscope, just to see what it says, stop. If you call 1-900 psychic, quit. You are dabbling with an underworld that exists. God does not warn you because they are innocent, silly, just for fun practices, but because they are a sinister doorway that grant a foothold to Satan.

Spiritist – one who consults with a personal spirit and serves as a channel

Continue in verse 11.

... *a spiritist* ...

This comes from the Hebrew verb “yada,” which means “to know”. This is one who consults with a personal spirit and serves as a channel.

Is it possible for someone who is dealing in spiritism to be in contact with an evil spirit who can transmit knowledge to the channeler? Absolutely! Consider, for example, the biblical accounts of demonized persons’ ability to recognize the apostle Paul or Jesus Christ without ever having had an introduction.

Do you not think that the demon world knows the weather in Australia or something that just happened on some street in New York? Do you not think they know your grandmother’s pet name or your uncle’s occupation? The speed of communication and travel in the spirit world is undoubtedly something you and I cannot comprehend.

Now, do not misunderstand, the underworld does not know the future any more than you or I. However, they are brilliant in reading the signs that may develop in the future.

Necromancer - one who calls up the dead

Look at the last of verse 11.

. . . one who calls up the dead [necromancer].

This is the final of the three forms of those who consult the spirit world in this list that God forbids.

The Messenger and Message From God

Let us go back to II Kings and pick up the story of a man who disregarded the warnings!

The Lord does not allow Ahaziah’s messengers to ever reach Ekron. Instead, they are intercepted by the prophet Elijah who has a special message for Ahaziah. Look at verses 5 and 6 of II Kings, chapter 1.

When the messengers returned to him he said to them, “Why have you returned?” They said to him, “A man came up to meet us and said to us, ‘Go, return 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 come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die.’”

Now, there were only a few people in the kingdom with the courage to talk to the king like that, so Ahaziah gets a little suspicious. Continue to verses 7 and 8.

He said to them, "What kind of man was he who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" They answered him, "He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

Now, Ahaziah should have repented as a result of this message. Even his father Ahab did, temporarily, after Elijah prophesied calamity upon him. Ahaziah did not, however. Instead, he will have Elijah arrested and imprisoned. He will teach that prophet a thing or two! Maybe he will even torture Elijah into changing his song of doom to a song of deliverance.

Look at verse 9.

Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'"

Did you notice the subtle insinuation of the real battle that is occurring? It is a battle between what the king says and what God says.

Elijah answers in verse 10.

Elijah replied to 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.

You need to understand that not only the king, but the ones who carried out his evil verdict are responsible before God.

Look at verse 11 for Ahaziah's response.

So he again sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he said to him, "O man of God, thus says the king, 'Come down quickly.'"

In other words, "Listen here, prophet of God, you're under arrest by the word of the king. Get down here right now."

The only thing that came down, as verse 12 tells us, was a fireball from heaven. All that remained was a black spot of earth.

You might say, "What a terrible thing to be one of those soldiers who died in a consuming fire."

So it would have been. But, my friend, that will not be the last time the fire of God falls upon an unbeliever. The Word of God declares that there is a day coming when all those who have rejected the light

of Christ will be cast into a eternal lake of fire; a terrible place of no escape, called hell.

To reject the message of Jesus Christ is to play with fire; to play with your future. Listen to Word of God, my friend, and if the truth of this message troubles you, that is only because it should. Would you yield your life to the Son of God today? The wonderful truth is, He has already faced the fire of God's wrath by dying on a cross. The fires of judgment have burned against Him for the sins of the whole world. And those who place their faith in Him will never need to fear the wrath of God, as they are saved from the fire to come. Are you safe today?!

Ahaziah responds again in verse 13.

So he again sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. . . .

How would you like to be a captain?!

. . . When the third captain of fifty went up, he 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."

Did you notice that they are not arresting soldiers of the king, they are servants of the prophet of God? Skip to verses 15 and 16.

The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king. Then he said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebul, 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.'"

Look at *the next three words* in verse 17.

So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. . . .

Application

Let me make three points of application from this story and the other scripture which we have looked at. It does not matter whether you are a king in ancient Israel or a Christian in this century, these three timeless truths apply.

God has forbidden the practice of contacting the spirit world for information

1. God has forbidden the practice of contacting the spirit world for information.

It is an affront to His sovereignty; a slap in His divine face to seek an answer from His arch-enemy, the king of demons who masquerades as an angel of light.

God has retained the sole privilege of knowing and revealing the future

2. God has retained the sole privilege of knowing and revealing the future.

By the way, God uses our lack of knowledge of the future as a way to develop faith in Him and patience. Deuteronomy, chapter 19, verse 29, says,

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

In other words, He knows everything and He has revealed everything that we need in the words of the law.

God has provided all that we need to live in harmony with the spiritual world through His Word

3. That leads me to the third principle, which is that God has provided all that we need to live in harmony with the spiritual world through His Word.

Listen to the prophet Isaiah as he warns, in chapter 8, verses 19 through 22,

When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they

are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness.

Ahaziah is distressed and hard pressed. His nation is at risk and his health is failing. He is afraid of dying! Will his gods help him now? He says, "Go quickly to the Lord of the flies and ask him if I will live or die!"

My friend, are you afraid of dying? Are you afraid that, after death:

- you might come back in the form of some other living being, depending on your goodness in this life, as the eastern Hindus teach?
- you will enter some limbo form of sound sleep, as the 7th Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses teach?
- you will have to suffer for your worst sins in purgatory, as the Roman Catholics teach?

My friend, if you have asked the Lord of heaven to forgive your sin and live within your heart, then, according to the Word of God, as II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 8, tells us,

. . . to [be] absent from the body [is] to be at home with the Lord.

There is a verse in the Word of God, specifically, Psalm, chapter 116, verse 15, that says,

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.

We do not like it, but God loves it. He calls our dying "precious". Why? Because He understands perfectly that, for His children, death is merely the hand that opens heaven's door and brings face to face fellowship with the Son.

This is truth by which you can confidently live and by which you can safely die. It is the Word of the Lord and it is the truth.

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