

2 Kings 1:1-18

The Short, Pathetic Reign of King Ahaziah

Ahaziah inherited all Ahab's weaknesses but none of his strengths.

2 Kings 1:1 - "Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab."

Moab had been subdued by David, but now they sought to take advantage of a weak ruler in Ahaziah and rebelled.

2 Kings 1:2 - "And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease."

"lattice" - *s^ebâkâh* = an ornamental parapet or railing, probably on the palace roof, where the king would retire in the evening to catch a cool breeze.

Early in Israel's history, God made a provision to prevent accidents there:

- **Deuteronomy 22:8** – "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it."

The Talmud (Bava Kamma 15b) extends the requirement for a parapet to all other hazards.

The Hassidic commentator Dov Baer Friedman took it a step further and applied a psychological aspect to the parapet. We need a parapet around our brain, he said, as restraining one's "swelling pride" that occurs in the "upper story" of one's mind.

The parapet stands as a symbol of responsibility for protecting the community - anyone who joins me on my roof should be assured of protection from an accidental fall.

The crumbling or deteriorating lattice or railing of the palace roof here stands for Ahaziah's lax rule and his spiritual bankruptcy. Not only had Ahaziah turned away from God like his father, but his political and military weaknesses were bringing the kingdom down.

His lack of attention to his own house and a cavalier attitude towards safety brings about Ahaziah's own literal downfall - he is injured and possibly incurred an infection that is getting worse.

Ahaziah was a failure as a ruler in every respect.

Baalzebub

"enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron" - Ekron was a Philistine city. Baalzebub means

"Lord of the Flies" and was considered able to control them or expel them. He was sought after to drive away flies, and was considered a healing god because flies were associated with sickness and pestilence. (for instance, Apollo Smintheus was the destroyer of mice among the Greeks). Sometimes people would put a slab of meat out "for Baalzebub" a distance from where they planned to sacrifice to another god. The flies would be attracted to the first "meal" and hopefully not encroach on the other main sacrifice.

The rabbis, by a small change of lettering, define Baalzebub as "Lord of Dung" because he is an object for idolatry.

In the New Testament, Baalzebub seems to be another name for Satan in Matthew 10:25; Matthew 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, 19).

Maybe Ahaziah's injuries were beginning to putrify, attracting flies.

Elijah

2 Kings 1:3-4 - "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 unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed."

Elijah delivered the message, and they report back to Ahaziah.

2 Kings 7-8 - "And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words? And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite."

A Hairy Man?

"Hairy" - because Elijah possibly was a Nazarite, under a Nazarite vow. Or, it could refer to his animal skin garment, which could still have the fur or hair intact.

John the Baptist wore a camel's hair cloak and came "in the spirit and power" of Elijah, and he was a Nazarite from birth.

- **Matthew 3:4** - "And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

If Elijah was under a Nazarite vow, his uncut hair represented his sins, and his need for repentance.

- **Numbers 6:5** - "All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow."

Long hair, left to grow wild (the use of a comb was forbidden because hair might be "shorn" in combing - Naz. vi. 3) was a mark of humility. Scriptures show hair is associated with sin and with "enemies."

- **Psalm 40:12** - "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me."

- **Psalm 69:4** - "Those who hate me without cause outnumber the hairs of my head; many are those who would destroy me - my enemies without cause."

The rabbis noticed that with different vowel points, "Nazir" becomes "Nezer," which means "crown." The Targum of Jonathan renders it, "the crown of his God."

The wild, uncut and unkempt hair of the Nazarite was described as his "crown" - a continual confession of one's sins and spiritual weakness and vulnerability.

It was also an admission that he was like Esau.

- **Romans 9:13** - "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," (See also **Malachi 1:3**)

Esau was a hairy man

- **Genesis 27:11** - "And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man"

Any true prophet of God is, like Elijah, always a "hairy" man - always walking in humility, aware of his own sins and his need to repent, knowing that left to himself, he is just like Esau, who sold his birthright.

2 Kings 1:9-10 - "Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty."

At Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal had been killed after their defeat in the contest with God. Now the political and government arm of the nation of Israel was to be judged. These men, probably like Ahab, "halted between two opinions" still. Their fate shows the seriousness with which God deals with our idolatry. This wasn't a result of Elijah's private whim. God was revealing his glory and presence by protecting his prophet.

Then the same thing takes place again! Fifty more soldiers are sent, and they are also consumed by fire from God.

Harsh! And yet these men had known what Elijah had done at Mount Carmel, and still retained loyalty to Ahab and Jezebel as well as to Baal.

As Mark Twain said: "How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!"

The Captain with his Fifty

There is a strong argument that the fate of the captain "with his fifty" represents God's judgment on the flesh.

"fifty" = *ḥāmiššîm*, a multiple of the root *ḥāmēšh* (five, fifteen, fifth, fifteenth)

The word consists of three consonants: *het-mem-shin*. In biblical Hebrew vowels were not written but inferred by the context.

If an *a* was substituted, *hamash* = "armed"

If an *o* is substituted, *homes* = "a fifth part"

Strangely, *homesh* can also mean the belly (**1 Samuel 2:23, 3:37, 4:6, and 20:10**)

A parallel word in Akkadian - *emsu* - means "womb"

- **1 Samuel 2:23** - "Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still."

under the "fifth rib" = "*homesh*" - Just means he was stabbed in the general area of his stomach.

So this word can relate to the stomach, the seat of our human fleshly desires. ("Their god is their belly" - **Philippians 3:19**)

In Genesis, the beasts were created on the fifth day. There are five senses. The Samaritan woman at the well had five husbands - i.e. she was "married to the flesh."

The death of our fleshly desires is depicted by Jesus being pierced with the spear of the Roman soldier - probably up through his stomach into his heart, from which water and blood issued.

[Thanks to Robert Sussland for this insight]

2 Kings 1:13 - "And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him,

and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight."

When a third contingent of troops arrive, their captain has a change of heart. Having seen the fate of the previous men, he begs for mercy with a humble spirit. This is always something God responds to with grace. They are spared.

2 Kings 1:15 - "And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king."

On His Deathbed

2 Kings 1:16 - "And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Ahaziah had been given three chances to repent, and he did not. So God's judgment through the prophecy of Elijah was carried out.

2 Kings 1:17 - "So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son."

It's confusing, but there are two different Jehorams mentioned here. One Jehoram was the brother of Ahaziah. The other was the King of Judah.

Ahaziah had no offspring, his last failure as a king.

Summary - The question we have to ask ourselves is "Where am I enquiring after Baalzebub?"

We want to "enquire" to know, and then control the future, to know what's going to happen, that's sorcery. Worship of an idol is how we pay for that knowledge. We are saying "there is no God in Israel"

In Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, we can see that Satan is following him around, trying to get Jesus to "enquire" about something related to this world - political power, miracles, special knowledge, or just satisfying his physical needs.

Jesus said there IS a god in Israel, and that's who I'm depending on. We face the same temptation.