

ESCAPE THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD?

By Chris Perry

The book of Second Kings begins with an injury to Ahaziah, son of Ahab and his successor as king of Israel: "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 Beelzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease" (2 Kings 1:2). Notice that Ahaziah-the king of the ten northern tribes of God's nation-sought advice from the false god of Ekron, Beelzebub. This request did not miss God's attention, either, for he commanded Elijah to tell the king's messengers, "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Beelzebub the god of Ekron? &Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die" (verses 3-4). When the messengers returned to Ahaziah with the bleak news, he sent them, along with a captain and fifty men, to Elijah. They stood at the base of a hill and cried up to Elijah: "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down" (verse 9). But Elijah did not come down; instead, he cried down to them, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and the fifty" (verse 10). And so it happened to the first captain and his fifty, as well as another captain and his fifty after them.

It is from the actions of a third fifty that a lesson becomes apparent. After hearing of the first two groups' destruction, the captain of the third fifty approached Elijah with caution and humility: "And the third captain...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" (verse 13). Truly, the captain had learned something from the experience of the other two, and his knowledge paid off. Elijah was told to "Go down with him: be not afraid of him" (verse 15), and he did so, stating once again the fate that awaited Ahaziah.

Now take a moment to consider the potential foolishness of the third captain had he witnessed the destruction of the other two groups yet still arrogantly proclaimed for Elijah to come down! Imagine the recklessness of seeing 102 people consumed by fire from heaven only to follow them with the same actions and attitudes. But isn't that-in a manner of speaking-exactly what so many have done throughout the history of mankind? Many witness the destruction of others because of sin, they see in the lives of others the horrible consequences of straying from God, only to follow them into the same sinful acts, thoughts, and lifestyles.

Such reckless abandon is especially foolish today, considering the wealth of examples we have to heed. Paul reminded both the Romans and Corinthians (and us by extension) that they had plenty of instruction in Old Testament examples: **"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"** (Romans 15:4); **"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come"** (1 Corinthians 10:11). We can read of Nadab and

Abihu being consumed by fire for disobeying God's implied command (Leviticus 10) and learn a lesson about God's authority; we can read of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the son of promise (Genesis 22) and learn a lesson about faith. And we, as people living after the cross, have the added benefit of near-complete Biblical hindsight, a privilege no one had before Christ. Paul time and again referred to God's scheme of redemption as a mystery

(Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 2:7; etc.), and Peter described the lack of knowledge that plagued the Old Testament prophets as follows: **"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"** (1 Peter 1:10-11). To our benefit, however, Peter finishes his inspired thought by adding that **"not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things"** (verse 12). We can look back to the pages of Biblical history with a more complete understanding of God's plan for saving man than ever before. Yet, still, many of us sin.

On top of the examples of Scripture is the vast number of occasions in which we see the principles of God's word proven true in daily life. Everyday the effects of sin are clearly displayed in real situations with real people, many of whom are connected intimately to our own lives. Every funeral I have ever preached (and most gospel preachers can say the same) has ended with a plea for those present to learn from their loved one's death that "it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). But how many have walked away from a loved one's funeral or the smoldering remains of an associate's sin-ruined life, only to make their own feet "swift in running to mischief"? (Proverbs 6:18).

It is said that insanity can be practically defined as doing the same thing and hoping to get different results. With such a definition in mind, it is no wonder that the Bible frequently defines wisdom as the opposite: knowledge gained from the experience of others. Solomon sought to impart what he had learned first hand to others so they would not have to learn the same way; hence, his frequent entreaties for "My son" to heed his wisdom and instruction (24 times in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes). Those with spiritual wisdom need not learn "the hard way" in every situation, but can instead draw from the mistakes of others and avoid similar pitfalls.

Friend, are you doing the same things that sinful people have done throughout history, but hoping somehow to escape the judgment of God? Won't you employ godly wisdom and learn from the mistakes of others? Truly, some people never learn-don't be counted among that number.

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