

The Death of the Wicked

1 Kings 22:29-40, 51-53, 2 Kings 1:1-18, 2 Kings 9:30-37

November 1, 2020

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Introduction: Bad News Comes in Threes

Have you ever heard the phrase: “Bad news comes in threes”? It’s just a folksy saying and probably only occasionally true. This past Thursday, our son Wesley texted us that not only had he received a low grade on his Econ test, but he also lost his water bottle and had been put in isolation because someone in one of his classes tested positive for covid. A more well-known example would be that on November 22, 1963 John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley (a President, a Christian writer, and a dystopian novelist) all died the exact same day! In 2009, Michael Jackson, Ed McMahon, and Farrah Fawcett all died in the same week. The church we came from in Virginia has already had three deaths of past or present members in 2020. Today’s passage is about three deaths also, but they are not grouped by their time of death, but by the fact that they are all part of the same family. In studying the life of Elijah, we’ve looked at the royal couple that he interacted with the most: Ahab and Jezebel. Today we’ll look at the end of their lives, as well as the end of their son, Ahaziah’s, life. I didn’t plan this, but these texts work pretty well with this Halloween weekend – it’s all pretty gruesome stuff, deaths in battle, people falling from high places, dogs licking up the blood, it could have been written by Stephen King. Sometimes we think of the Bible as this really poetic book full of wisdom and inspiration, the place to go to get words of comfort when life gets hard. And the Bible is certainly that in many places. But the Bible is a huge book with a lot of different sections and genres, and it’s pretty dark in places. Not dark for the sake of being dark, but dark for the sake of being historically and theologically accurate. So, let’s get morose and just talk about death for the next half hour, shall we?

The first text we’re going to look at records

I. Ahab’s Death (1 Kings 22:29-40)

Last week we read about when Elijah was sent by God to rebuke Ahab about his killing Naboth to take over his vineyard. Keep in mind that it’s actually Jezebel who accomplished all of that, but in God’s eyes, Ahab was complicit in the murder because he set the wheels in motion, and he was king and allowed it to happen. And Elijah prophesied to him that his death would result in his blood being licked by dogs at the exact same place that Naboth’s blood was licked up by dogs. Pretty gruesome stuff, but turn with me to 1 Kings chapter 22, verses 29-40 to see Ahab’s end. He has made an alliance with the king of Judah, a righteous king named Jehoshaphat, and gone into battle against Syria, a common enemy:

²⁹ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. ³⁰ And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes.” And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. ³¹ Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, “Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel.” ³² And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, “It is surely the king of Israel.” So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. ³³ And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. ³⁴ But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, “Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.” ³⁵ And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. ³⁶ And about sunset a cry went through the army, “Every man to his city, and every man

to his country!"³⁷ So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria.³⁸ And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken.³⁹ Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?⁴⁰ So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

How fitting that Ahab tried to hide and made the godly king, Jehoshaphat, wear his royal robes. The enemy army, the Syrians, had a charge to kill the King of Israel, so Ahab hoped to avoid death by disguising himself. But an archer drew his bow and "randomly" hit Ahab, a mortal wound that would kill him by the end of the day. What a "lucky" shot, right? Even random events and lucky coincidences are used by the God who sees and holds all of human history in His hands; God used that shot to bring His justice to end the worst reign of an Israelite king. Verse 39 speaks of Ahab having built an ivory house, which must have been luxurious and impressive, and of all the cities that he built. Most people of that day probably remembered him by those things, but that's not the important thing to the writer of King, is it? He went down in Biblical history as a king who took Israel further and further away from the Lord. He was what Jesus was talking about when He said in Mark 8:36, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

But Ahab's influence continued to be felt: in 1 Kings 22:51-53 introduces us to Ahaziah: "Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He served Baal and worshipped him and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done." Normally only the kings, the fathers, would be listed in these summaries of the kings' reigns, but since Jezebel was so clearly a strong influence of evil, she is listed as well. The name Ahaziah means "held by Yahweh," but it's clear that was not the case - his heart was held by Baal instead.¹ It's worth spending a little bit of time asking: if both of your parents have been held captive by particular sins, addictions, or problems in their lives, are you destined to repeat those same things? No, by God's grace you are not bound to your parents' sins. Now, you are probably much more prone to those sins, and there is a lot of truth to the saying "like father like son," but there is always a choice to say, "this cycle of dysfunction, these generational curses stop with me!" My dad's dad was full of anger, he used to rule his house by yelling at and hitting his kids. And when my dad and his brother were young, they both repeated what they saw and were very angry and violent. When they came to faith in Christ as teenagers, they both realized that they could break that cycle and deal with their anger in constructive, not destructive, ways. My dad never raised his hand to me in anger. It's not easy, but you aren't doomed to repeat the mistakes of your parents. The Lord can give you the strength to make a new way, to live a godly life.

Unfortunately, Ahaziah did not live that way. We don't get much of his life, but a full chapter about **II. Ahaziah's Death (2 Kings 1:1-18)**

(1 & 2 Kings were written as one book, but probably separated when 1 Kings filled a scroll; so the scribes started a second scroll and called it 2 Kings. But it interrupts Ahaziah's story.)

¹ After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel. ² Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness." 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

¹ Gary Inrig, *I & II Kings* (Nashville: Holman, 2003), p. 193.

because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?⁴ Now therefore thus says the Lord, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.” So Elijah went.⁵ The messengers returned to the king, and he said to them, “Why have you returned?”⁶ And they said to him, “There came a man to meet us, and 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 come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’”⁷ He said to them, “What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?”⁸ They answered him, “He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.” And he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.”⁹ Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. 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.’”¹⁰ But 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.¹¹ Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty men with his fifty. And he answered and said to him, “O man of God, this is the king's order, ‘Come down quickly!’”¹² But 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.¹³ Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And 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.”¹⁴ Behold, 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.”¹⁵ Then 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.¹⁶ And (Elijah) 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 come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’”¹⁷ So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken. Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son.¹⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

So the new king of Israel, Ahab's son Ahaziah, fell from the second floor of his palace and lay sick and dying. So he sent people to inquire of a prophet of God to see if he would recover, right? No, of course not! He's Ahab's son after all. He sent people to Baal-zebub, the Lord of the flies, who the text says was the god of Ekron. This is a god of Israel's enemy, the Philistines. Ahaziah wanted to know if that god could tell him whether he would recover or not.

As I drive to church, I pass a building on Route 13 that says “Psychic Readings.” Apparently, the owner of the store guarantees that you will have a positive experience, because online she claims “It is my passion to help others find their bliss and shift their perception to see the positive side of their life in even the toughest of times..I believe Psychic abilities are a gift that should be used for good, to help others and lift them up, and this is exactly how I approach all aspects of this business. I am NOT one of those 'neon sign' psychics who try to convince clients they are 'cursed' or have a 'dark aura' just to try and charge an ungodly fee to 'cleanses' the client..these are scams i dont believe in..you will see the difference with me right away as I strive to help my clients feel 1,000 times better than before our session!” So if you want to feel 1,000 times better than you do right now, go get a reading from her. No, please don't go to her! I'm definitely praying that covid puts her out of business... It's interesting that she uses the phrase “ungodly” in her write-up, because I think this is one of the places that Ahaziah would have gone if he had already called the psychic hotline, checked his horoscope in the paper, and consulted his Ouija board. And Elijah cuts to the heart of this behavior: “Is it because

there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of false gods and false ways to hear about the future? Beloved, please don't mess around with any of that stuff! We have a God who invites us to pray to Him, to be our Rock and our Fortress, who cares for His sheep, guiding us with His hand of providence and seeing us through the prosperous as well as difficult times of our lives. There's one word for what turning away from Him to these other sketchy methods is: "unbelief." You either believe that God holds your life in His hands or you don't and you go looking for guidance in all the wrong places. Leviticus 19:31 and 20:6 says, "*Do not turn to mediums or necromancers (people who talk to the dead); do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God... I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.*"

So the messengers who were sent out returned with a prophecy from Yahweh not from Baal-zebul. Elijah intercepted them and delivered a message of doom to the king's messengers, but they didn't know who he was. But the king knew as soon as he heard the description of his appearance: "Oh yeah, the hairy garment with the leather belt. That's Elijah, my dad had to deal with him a lot."

It's important for us to understand how the New Testament sees Elijah as a forerunner of John the Baptist. I probably should have done this at the beginning of our study of Elijah, but I didn't, so I guess I'll put it right here:²

-The most obvious parallel between Elijah and John is the way they dress. Compare 2 Kings 1:7-8 with Matthew 3:4:

2 Kings 1:7-8 - "*He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.*"

Matthew 3:4 - "*Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist.*"

John was retro, wearing what the prophets 800 years earlier had worn.

-Both Elijah and John anointed their successors at the Jordan River. Elijah gave Elisha a double portion of his spirit (we'll see next week), while John baptized Jesus.

-Before John was born, the angel Gabriel told his father in Luke 1:17 that John would "*go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*"

-Jesus Himself referred to John as the new Elijah: in Matthew 17:12-13 He said, "*I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*"

Why were two of the squads of soldiers destroyed with fire but not the third? The third was led by a man who fell on his knees and begged Elijah! He approached with reverence and humility. The first two commanders came in might and force and ordered the prophet to come down; they were basically sent to arrest him. That was not met with appreciation. God showed his might over Israel's army, but showed mercy when the last commander humbled himself and begged for his life. There's a funny reference to this story in the Gospels. Luke 9:53-56 records: "*But the people (Samaritans) did not receive Him (Jesus), because His face was set toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But He turned and rebuked them.*" James and John wanted to be like Elijah and call down fire from heaven on Samaria when the town rejected Jesus. Jesus did not condemn Elijah, He simply said that would not be His way. People always want to point to that and say, "See, the God of the OT was vicious and violent, the God of the NT is patient and forgiving." Well, we believe that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that there's a lot more going on than that.

² Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah & Elisha* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1999), pp. 10-12.

There's a big difference between a village of people being rude to you and 50 soldiers coming to arrest a prophet of God to take him to his death.

So Ahaziah died, and 2 Kings 10 records how Jehu, a later king, killed 70 of Ahab's other sons. He even killed all of Ahaziah's relatives. OK, so we've got the end of the father's and the son's lives, now let's wrap up this trio of deaths with the mother.

III. Jezebel's Death (2 Kings 9:30-37)

³⁰ When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window. ³¹ And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?" ³² And he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked out at him. ³³ He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down. And some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her. ³⁴ Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." ³⁵ But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. ³⁶ When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel,³⁷ and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'"

Jezebel remained defiant to the end – taunting Jehu as a murderer and drawing a parallel to Zimri whose rebellion had lasted only seven days. Perhaps there was a mixed message from her since she painted her face and dressed up and asked about peace. But Jehu did not care if she flattered him or insulted him; she was a cursed, evil woman and he was ridding the kingdom of her influence. He simply asked if anyone in the room with her would do him a favor and throw her down, which three servants did. All went according to Elijah's prophecy for her death.

Phillip Ryken sums up her death: "The queen did not even receive the honor of a decent burial, for God despised the head that plotted Naboth's death and the hands that signed his death warrant. Her death stands as a permanent warning to everyone who murders, covets, lies, cheats, or steals. It is a warning to everyone who serves money rather than God. God will judge people for these sins!"³

Conclusion:

Jezebel outlived her husband and all of her children. Ahab reigned for twenty-two years, Ahaziah for less than two. How was that fair, wasn't Ahab the worst king Israel ever had or would have? Fairness is not the point. God in His sovereign wisdom decided to only allow the son two years on the throne for His own purposes and plans. Bishop Hall observed a long time ago, "Some sinners live long to aggravate their judgment, others die soon to hasten it."⁴ Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, "*Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.*" People make the mistake that because God is rich in mercy and patient in His judgment that they can go on sinning without remorse. But ask Sodom and Gomorrah how that turned out.

As we think of the lives of these three rulers, I'm reminded of Psalm 73 (turn there) and its description of a godly person looking at the wicked and how unjust it all seems: Verse 3: "*For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... (verses 8-9) They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their*

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), p. 574.

⁴ David Roper, *Elijah: A Man Like Us* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1997), p. 214.

tongue struts through the earth... (verse 12) Behold these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches." The author, whose name was Asaph, could not understand why the wicked prospered and got away with things. In contrast, he and the other godly people he knew were not prospering and were starting to feel like they were not being rewarded for being godly. The turn in the Psalm comes in verse 17: *"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."* In other words, when he went to worship God, when he went to church, he realized something very important: verses 18-20: *"Truly You set them in slippery places; You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when You rouse Yourself, You despise them as phantoms... (v. 27) For behold, those who are far from You shall perish; You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to You."* And he ends the Psalm praising God and calling Him the strength of his heart and his refuge.

The Bible contains some really good news: there is a wonderful, holy, amazing, all-powerful God who loves and saves. But the Bible has some really bad news: those who do not follow this amazing, all-powerful God will not experience His love and saving mercy. They will experience His wrath and justice. I know that there is a huge temptation for Christians to soften the blow and tell people that God will figure out a way to save everyone, that eternal punishment is not really what it sounds like. And if the Bible said that, that's what I would teach. But it does not. Jesus taught on hell frequently, He taught us that it is a real place where those whose sin are held against them will spend eternity. It's not loving to lie to people and say that the Bible doesn't really say that God will judge people eternally. It's loving to warn them that if they don't repent and turn to Jesus, they will perish in their sins when they die. They may live to 100, they may die as teenagers, or they may die in an accident like falling in their house. Galatians 6:7 - *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."* Ahab, his wife, and his son reaped what they sowed. Don't make the mistake, though, that it's just the Jezebels, the Hitlers, the terrible people who will face harsh judgment from God. All people fall short of God's standard and have earned punishment.

But the table of the Lord tells us that there is a chance to be free of reaping what you sowed in this life. Because all of us have sowed some bad things, all of us have amassed a record of sin that counts against us and condemns us in the sight of God. And really, one sin is enough to be separated from God for eternity. Any sin on your record is worthy of God's punishment, and He demands that your death pay for your sins. But the bread of Christ's body and the cup of Christ's blood tell us there is a way to pay for your sins before you die: to have someone die in your place!

(transition to communion)