

LIVING ON THE EDGE

A series on the
life of
Elijah

Group study guide
Part eight
17th November 2019



Evil is a word which we don't like to use too much, if at all, it is reserved for those people who commit actions that we can all agree on are way outside the bounds of human normality. But what is evil, and where does evil come from, and when it is recognised how should we respond?

In this the penultimate installment of our series "Living on the edge," Elijah is still challenging the leadership of Israel as they refuse to put God first and foremost in their lives and the life of Israel, choosing instead to pursue the worship of Baal and other gods. Will Elijah's exhortation be listened to or will he continue to be ignored?

fter 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 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 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 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?
(2 Kings 1:1-18 ESV)*

Commentary

There is a new king of Israel, his name is Ahaziah, and he succeeds his father Ahab. Ahab went to war against the Assyrians in an alliance with the king of Judah Jehoshaphat. Before they set out Ahab's prophets predicted victory, but at Jehoshaphat's request a prophet of the Lord was brought, Micaiah, who after some prompting told them they would be defeated and Ahab killed. The kings disregarded the prophecy and went to war, but Ahab to be on the safe side disguised himself, but it didn't stop an opportune arrow finding its mark and mortally wounding him. Micaiah's prophecy came true as did Elijah's when Ahab's chariot was washed out and the dogs licked up his blood.

Ahaziah takes the mantle of ruling Israel but the narrator's summary of him is not good:

51 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. 52 He did what was 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 made Israel to sin. 53 He served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done. (1 kings 22:51-53 ESV)

Commentary

That's not exactly a glowing tribute, and in the story that follows we understand why. Ahaziah has an accident, falls and badly hurts himself, but instead of seeking answers from God he sends messengers to Ekron and Baa-Zebub which translated means lord of the flies, most likely not a complimentary title! The messengers don't get far before being intercepted by Elijah who has a question, *"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?"* God has the answer for Ahaziah even though he has not been asked, and Ahaziah is going to die.

When the messengers return so quickly Ahaziah questions them why, and as they give the description, he realises who the man is. Sending fifty men to seize Elijah they meet with a fiery end, and so do the next fifty, as Elijah shows his connection with God by calling down fire. The third fifty are spared as their leader pleads for their lives, and Elijah, assured by the Angel of the Lord of his safety, goes with the men to tell Ahaziah in person the answer to his inquiry.

Group Study

Start this week's group by reviewing your responses to last week's study, how you applied them during the week, what you discovered as you applied them. What were the successes and difficulties, and where adjustments will you need to make?

What would you like to find out about?

What are your sources of inquiry?

How do you think the Lord sees your sources of inquiry?

How do you decide what to use as a resource?

What happens when we get desperate to hear an answer?

READ 1 Samuel 28:5-20

Have you ever felt so desperate for an answer that you are willing to do just about anything to get one?

How desperate do you think Saul must have been to get an answer to his inquiry?

Does it surprise you that like it did the medium that God could respond to Saul's inquiry?

Did Saul get to hear what he wanted to hear?

When Ahaziah heard Elijah's answer from God how did he react?

What do you think he hoped to achieve by sending military units to seize Elijah?

Compare Ahaziah's reaction to Josiah's when he was shown the book of the law.

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her. And she said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be

quenched. But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.” And they brought back word to the king.

2 Kings 28:11-20

Wrap up

How will what you have discussed alter the way you will make inquiries in the future?

Personal study

In the sermon three ways of using God's resources was mentioned. Read the following scriptures about the three, and consider how you practice them and react to them.

The Word

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16 -217 ESV)

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 ESV)

24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-27 ESV)

Community

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrew 10:24-25)

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe[a] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 ESV)

8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11 ESV)

