

DUMB OR DUMBER

Read 2 Kings 1

Ahaziah may be one of the dumbest kings who ever lived. I should know; I am the captain who is still alive in spite of Ahaziah's stupidity. When you read about Ahaziah you might think that he is dumb because he tumbles from the second story window of his palace (2 Kings 1:2). But, though sitting on a second story windowsill may be a foolhardy thing to do, it is not why you should consider him dumb. Neither should you consider him dumb when he wants to know whether he will live or die from the injuries he incurs from this fall (1:2). No, he is dumb because he answers a question wrongly three times. You will find the question and the answer in the following story from the Scriptures I now believe in.

The question is first asked when Elijah the prophet from God is directed by the angel of the Lord to "meet the messengers of the king" (1:3). These messengers are traveling to the temple of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to inquire for the king whether he will live or die. The inquiry is not improper, but the choice to seek the answer from an idol is. Elijah is required to intercept the messengers to demand of the king, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub?" (1:3). Since the king is an Israelite who knows that there is a God in Israel, we also must ask the same question: why is Ahaziah going to an idol--Baal-zebub--instead of to the Lord?

In order to answer this query we will need to use the first key to a dynamic Bible study-- discovering repeated words. This requires reading the text slowly, carefully, and frequently. In the immediate story the repeated word is initially found in the Ahaziah's consequences for inquiring of Baal-zebub whether he will live or die. God declares to Ahaziah, "You shall not **come down** from the bed where you have gone up, but you shall surely die" (1:4).

The words "come down" are again used when the messengers report Elijah's message to the king, "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" (1:6). Recording the message of God a second time informs the reader that it is important. We must learn why Ahaziah inquires of Baal-zebub instead of the Lord.

When the king realizes from the messengers' description that it is Elijah who has prophesied against him, he is furious. The king, being dumb (or shall we say dumber), sends first one captain with fifty men to arrest Elijah and then another captain of fifty men. Each captain demands, "O man of God, the king says, '**Come down!**'" (1:9 and 11). To each Elijah, sitting on a mountainside replies, "If I am a man of God, let fire **come** down from heaven and consume you and your fifty" (1:10 and 12). In both cases "fire **came down** from heaven" and the fire consumes the captains with their men.

Since not even a hair on the king's body has been singed, he sends a third captain to thwart the prophecy of his death. When the third captain arrives at Elijah's mount we are expecting him to act in the same manner as the first two. Instead, the captain "bowed down on his knees" and begs Elijah to spare him and his soldiers' lives (1:13-14). Therefore, no fire comes down. God instructs Elijah to "**Go down** with him." Elijah, then, "arose and **went down** with him to the king" (1:15).

The final time the thrice repeated query from the Lord is given to Ahaziah occurs when Elijah is speaking directly to him. Even now, there is no answer from the king why he “sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub” rather than to the Lord whether he will live or die. But we can formulate one by first noting that though fire “**came down**” on the first two captains; it did not on the third captain. The captain’s plea for mercy demonstrates that he, not Ahaziah, has come to fear the God of Elijah.

Thus, the answer to Elijah’s question—“Is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to inquire of Baal-zebub?”--is that Ahaziah does not fear God; hence he has not sent his inquiry to the Lord. As a result, Ahaziah is told that he shall not “**come down**” from his bed but “will surely die.” Ahaziah, by not fearing God, is either dumb OR dumber. And, therefore, we are not surprised when the narrative abruptly ends, “So Ahaziah died.”