

Introduction: What kind of father would knowingly mislead a child into the ways of death? Deadly wrong beliefs or deadly wrong actions – both are contrary to what a natural father, (even one who is fallen in sin like Adam our first father), would ever bestow upon his son! As Jesus says in Luke 11:11-13:

¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

May God impress upon us the importance of trusting the ways of God in this week's notes, helping us to learn that the only safe path for us and our children is to follow God's footsteps. Amen.

Monday: read 1 Kings 22:41-43 & 22:50-53. Passed from father to son, the ways of godliness are passed on from King Asa of Judah to his son Jehoshaphat, who “did not turn aside from doing what was right in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 22:41-43).

Not that Jehoshaphat was perfect or sinless, any more than his “father in the faith”, King David (1 Kings 22:50). But there was a godly direction to Jehoshaphat's life which showed that God had claimed the king as His own child and changed his heart from unbelieving disobedience to a faith which walked in the ways of God and followed the faith of his believing predecessors.

Tragically, the same cannot be said for Ahab. He did not pass on the faith to his royal family. So the son who succeeded him, Ahaziah, “did evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother” (1 Kings 22:52).

Meditate and Pray: Use the words of this great hymn as a prayer, asking God to never let you wander from His righteous ways, (# 491 in our hymnals):

1 Take me, O my Father, take me;
take me, save me, through thy Son;
that which thou wouldst have me, make me,
let thy will in me be done.
Long from thee my footsteps straying,
thorny proved the way I trod;
weary come I now, and praying,
take me to thy love, my God.

2 Fruitless years with grief recalling,
humbly I confess my sin;
at thy feet, O Father, falling,
to thy household take me in.
Freely now to thee I proffer
this relenting heart of mine;
freely life and soul I offer,
gift unworthy love like thine.

3 Once the world's Redeemer, dying,
bore our sins upon the tree;
on that sacrifice relying,
now I look in hope to thee:
Father, take me; all forgiving,
fold me to thy loving breast;
in thy love for ever living
I must be forever blest.

Tues/Weds/Thurs/Friday: read 1 Kings 22:51 - 2 Kings 1:18. If we need any further proof of the hostility of Ahab's family – simply consider how Ahab's son sent one hundred and fifty soldiers after Elijah to try and seize him in 2 Kings 1:1-18. Evidently this unbelieving king Ahaziah had the same murderous hatred of God's prophet that his mother expressed in 1 Kings 19:2.

But, praise be to the LORD and His protecting grace, God's fire from Heaven was the LORD's means of saving Elijah from Ahaziah's clutches. Two times God's fire bolted down from heaven and destroyed the first two of the king's henchmen and their fifty-men deployments. Since God knew the plan of these troops was to take Elijah's life, He decisively acted in judgment against these foes.

But how merciful of God to spare the last officer sent and his fifty men in 2 Kings 1:13-15. Listen to the words of this third captain, moved to plead for God's mercy, which He will always grant to those who ask:

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.

Moved by the Spirit of God to cry out for his life and the lives of his men, no less a personage than the Angel of the LORD (2 Kings 1:15) reassured Elijah that *this officer* was safe to conduct the prophet into the presence of the king of Israel. So he went down with this officer in order to confront the wicked king of Israel. What a turn-around! The last fifty sent to destroy the prophet become his honor guard as they take him to the king.

At this final audience with Azariah, king of Israel, Elijah thunders the judgment of God down upon the head of this wicked man –

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.'

Meditate and Pray: The sober result of the prophet's words is that the king of Israel dies in 2 Kings 1:17. Sing with sober thankfulness that God has revealed Himself *to you*, when so many make the wretched choice of Azariah to die without the LORD and without any hope of salvation. The words are from # 469 in our hymn book and form our meditation for Friday:

1 How sweet and awesome is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.

2 While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

3 "Why was I made to hear your voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice,
and rather starve than come?"

4 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.

5 Pity the nations, O our God,
constrain the earth to come;
send your victorious Word abroad,
and bring the strangers home.

6 We long to see your churches full,
that all the chosen race
may, with one voice and heart and soul,
sing your redeeming grace.

Saturday/Sunday: read 2 Kings 1:5-14; Hebrews 12:28-29 7 Leviticus 9:22-24. To fill in the blanks in the first chapter of 2 Kings, it was when king Ahaziah realized that the man of God (who forbade the king's envoys from an audience with the idol Baal) was no one less than Elijah himself, the hated enemy of his dead father Ahab, (2 Kings 1:5-8), that this evil monarch decided to send as many troops as necessary to bring down Elijah to his doom. Were it not for the fire of God, the prophet indeed would have lost his life to these troops sent by Azariah. But instead, just as the LORD used a fiery pillar to protect His people in the desert from the army of Pharaoh in Exodus 14:19-20, so the fire of God surrounded Elijah and protected him from murder at the king of Israel's hands.

Doesn't this remind you of the fire that came down from heaven as a sign that Elijah's offering was accepted in 1 Kings 18:38-39?

The lesson is clear: The Fire of the LORD, for us as God's people, means safety and the gracious acceptance of our service and worship. We rejoice when our offerings, given to the LORD on the altar of Jesus' sacrifice, are accepted by our Father in Heaven! Truly it is good news for us to hear the words of Hebrews 12:28-29 – that, because we place all our hope for salvation in Jesus Christ, we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and offering a worship to God that cannot be rejected – since God as a consuming fire has burned up all our sin on the Cross where Jesus died. We can shout with joy as the fire which God sends is a fire of grace and acceptance of us through Jesus' sacrifice. Compare the joy which God's priests had in Leviticus 9:22-24, when the fire of God came down and accepted their burnt offerings, they shouted and fell on their faces!

***Closing Prayer:** Our Father, thank you for giving us a Savior who was consumed on the Cross by the fire of your judgment in order that the fire of your grace might fall upon us. Through your Spirit's gentle flame, consume away all our sin, and make us acceptable in your sight through Jesus Christ alone, Amen.*