

What City Will You Be In When Death Knocks On Your Door?

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It was just a few minutes until midnight. I had finished my day's work and was walking to my car, when I noticed a friend of mine getting out of his car.

"Hi," I said, with my usual greeting, "How're things with you?"

"Very good," he replied, "but it's strange meeting you because I have been thinking about you."

"Good or bad?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "I'll let you be the judge."

He went on to say, "I was thinking about those times you talked to me about the Bible while we were working together last year. I have been reading the writings of the Apostle Paul. They fascinate me, but I can't seem to get through the first one. I keep going back over and over the same one. It really was something how much zeal he had—how determined he was."

"Funny you should mention that," I answered. "All day it has been going through my mind how good God is to us, and how desperately He wants us to let Him lead us. He created the world. He stepped down from His ivory throne, came to earth, and laid down His life so that we could escape hell and make heaven our home. He saves a sinner, turns him into a Christian, and then gives him the opportunity to beg and plead with people to accept His plan of Salvation. He almost gets down on His knees in front of the creature He created and begs them to follow Him, but still they won't accept Him."

Afterward, I wondered if my friend really understood what I was trying to say to him. Again I thought, if there was only some way to make him understand eternal life through Christ Jesus.

There was just something about this man that I had always liked. I was glad that he was reading the Bible. Maybe it was the best thing that ever happened to him, I thought, while I was on my way home.

Little did I know that would be the last time I would ever see my friend. The following week, he went to Canada on a vacation and died there with a heart attack.

What if he had known in advance? Maybe he would have stayed home. Maybe things might have turned out differently. Then I remembered when I was a small boy in school someone said to me, "I wish I knew what city I would die in."

When I asked him why, he said, "Then I would never go there."

Suddenly, I Kings 21 and 22 came to my mind. God had told two different people in the Bible exactly what city they would die in, and you know, they both got there just in time to meet their appointment with death.

It's one of the strangest stories in the entire Bible . . .

Ahab was king over Israel, and Jezebel, his wife, was queen. They had everything, but just like it is today, they still weren't happy. They were not satisfied.

Next to the king's palace, a good, hardworking man had a beautiful vineyard. Ahab wanted that vineyard more than anything in the world. He tried desperately to buy it from Naboth, the owner, but Naboth just would not sell it. Ahab went home and went to bed. He wouldn't even eat.

This vineyard had become an obsession to him. His wife, after seeing that something was wrong, asked Ahab to tell her what troubled him. He said that he wanted the vineyard next door and Naboth would not give it up.

Jezebel cared for nothing and no one. Murder was nothing strange for her. "Eat, drink and let your heart be merry," she said. "I'll get the vineyard for you."

She sat down and wrote letters to the political leaders in Naboth's town. She said, "Have him framed for the crime of treason and make sure he dies." She signed the letters with Ahab's name. A few days later, she received word that the job had been done. Naboth had been stoned to death. So Ahab rose up from his bed and started down to claim his vineyard.

God saw what happened. Now God, the Bible says, is not easily provoked. He is slow to anger, plenteous in mercy, and gracious. He is also a God of righteous judgment. So God sent Elijah, the prophet, to foretell the death of Ahab and Jezebel. He told Ahab the exact city and spot where he would die. He said that exactly where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth when he was stoned to death is exactly where the dogs would lick Ahab's blood. As for Jezebel, the prophet continued, the dogs shall one day, eat her by the walls of the city of Jezreel.

Things went pretty well for about four years. They even had three years of perfect peace with the Syrians. I personally believe that Ahab steered clear of the area where Naboth died. However, be that as it may, the day finally came when God had to fulfill His Word.

One day God called a meeting in heaven, and He asked who would go down and persuade Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead that he might be killed. God was setting His plan to kill Ahab into action. Ahab had to be near the gravesite of Naboth so the dogs could lap up his blood.

Several members of the congregation had different ideas as to how to get Ahab up to Ramoth-gilead. Finally, a lying spirit stepped forward. "I will go," he said, "and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his preachers."

As I write this, I think: Oh, Lord! Nothing has changed since Ahab's day. Thousands of preachers preach there is no literal hell. Do the best you can. Love your wife, love your children, and be good to your neighbor. Just treat everyone right. But God thunders out page after page throughout the Bible, you must be "born again." You must have a new life; a change must come into your heart. There must be something inside that lets you know you are a child of God.

As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:8, the wind of the breath of God has got to blow on you. You don't understand where it comes from, neither which way it goes, but it passes by and you know it was there. Something inside tells you, all things are now new and different. The old you has passed on. It is like getting a second chance with life. There is no mistaking that "wind" of the Spirit when it comes into your life.

That same lying spirit that worked to fulfill God's purpose back in Bible days is at work today, sending multitudes to the second death, the lake that burns with fire. Ahab had a choice to do what was right, just like each one of us today; but Ahab chose to do evil, and that decision cost him his life.

So the lying spirit went down and began to talk through all of Ahab's preachers. "Go on up to Ramoth-gilead, Ahab. Fight, take the city and come home victorious; it's all yours, Ahab! You can't lose. All your preachers agree you are right."

Now Jehoshaphat was king over Judah. He was a good man, but he was a little ignorant of the devil's devices. Ahab needed someone to become a decoy for him; someone who would dress like King Ahab, so Ahab could disguise himself as an ordinary man. Jehoshaphat was just that man. The Syrians would try to kill him, thinking he was Ahab.

Poor old Jehoshaphat! How was he to know that the king of Syria had commanded his thirty-two captains that ruled over his chariots saying, "Fight neither with small nor great, just get Ahab for me." When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat in Ahab's armor, they said, "Surely, this is Ahab." Then they ran after him to kill him."

Jehoshaphat realized this was it, and time was running out for him. He started calling on God. The Bible says in II Chronicles 19:1-3 that Jehoshaphat had been seeking God back in the days when things were going good. He had prepared his heart earlier, and he was one of God's children who had made a mistake. Now he was calling on God in his time of need.

Thank God, He always answers when His children call. In the day of trouble He said call, and I will hear you; I will deliver you. God heard the cry of Jehoshaphat, and He revealed to the captains of the chariots that the king they were chasing wasn't Ahab. They turned aside, and Jehoshaphat escaped.

Ahab had not prepared his heart against the day of evil. He never read God's Word. He always depended upon someone else to answer his questions. He didn't like Micaiah, the one true preacher that God sent to him (I Kings 22:13-27). Ahab rejected his advice. He said that Micaiah always brought him bad news. Micaiah warned Ahab, saying, "Don't go up to Ramoth-gilead, for if you do, you will surely die."

It almost looked like Ahab would get away, but "the soul that sinneth, it shall surely die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Ahab had an appointment by the pool of Samaria. The dogs were waiting at the gravesite of Naboth for Ahab's blood. One of the Syrians slipped an arrow into his bow and took a shot on a venture. The Bible says he just took a chance that by shooting into the crowd he would hit something. The arrow flew through the air and struck Ahab. He turned to his chariot driver, "Get me out of here, I am wounded!" he said. The driver turned the horses and headed for the place where Naboth was stoned to death.

No doubt Ahab was thinking of his wound. Maybe it had slipped his mind, or perhaps he had forgotten what God had said. He had other things on his mind. The blood ran down into a puddle in the middle of the chariot. That evening Ahab died. He died without God. The driver turned the chariot toward the pool of Samaria. Here, four years ago, Naboth had been stoned to death. As the driver got out and began to wash the blood from the chariot, the dogs came up and started licking up poor Ahab's blood.

Sinner, one day you too will have an appointment with death and then the judgment. Like Ahab, God never tells you the day or the hour. It could be before you finish reading this. Maybe it will be tomorrow or next week or while you're enjoying that nice, well-deserved vacation you are planning. But be assured that the day will arrive, like all other days. Sooner or later, death will catch up with you.

Do you feel something pulling at your heart? It might be God's Spirit trying to prepare you against next week, next spring, or whenever your appointment with death arrives.

God had told Jezebel that the dogs would eat her by the walls of the city of Jezreel. It seems strange that seventeen years later, Jezebel is living upstairs, just over the walls of the city of Jezreel. One might say, "What is she doing here? She should never have come to this city." However, time passes, and people forget. Sometimes people seem to get away with so much that they don't believe God. It could be she thought that maybe God had forgotten about Naboth.

Solomon gave some good advice to young people in Ecclesiastes 11:9. "Rejoice, Oh young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

In other words, he was saying: Young people, have a good time, enjoy yourselves, and do whatever you feel like doing. Whatever your eyes see that you like, get it for yourself—women, men, wine, or song, but know for certain that God will bring you into judgment for every single one of them.

Jezebel heard that the new king, Jehu, was on his way into the town of Jezreel (II Kings 9:30). She really fixed herself up. She painted her face and fixed her hair. She, at one time, had eight hundred and fifty prophets, and all of them had eaten from her table. Surely Jehu was no different. Jezebel didn't know that God puts up and God takes down. He holds the hearts of kings in His hand. He can cause one to find favor or dislike as He chooses.

Jehu looked up at Jezebel and cried, "Who is on my side? Who?"

Two or three eunuchs looked down over the wall. "Throw Jezebel down," Jehu said to the eunuchs. They grabbed her and threw her down. Her blood splattered on the wall and under the horse's hooves as he rode over her body.

Jehu went into the house and sat down to eat and drink. After a while he started thinking . . . she is a king's daughter. So he sent his men out to bury her. The dogs, smelling the blood, had eaten everything but her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands. The men went back into the house. They told Jehu what they had seen, and then he remembered what God had said about Jezebel. She was there, right on time for her appointment with death. Her appointed day had come.

Paul said in Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment." But Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, I take care of my sheep." He said that He's our High Priest who is always touched by our troubles and always ready to help us up if we should stumble, just like He helped Jehoshaphat.

I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Bow your head! Say: "Father, I ask you to be merciful to me a sinner. Cleanse me from all my sins and make me a new creature in Christ Jesus. Amen!"

Jesus will be your keeper. He'll be your shelter in the time of a storm if you will tell Him that from this day on you will follow Him.

I guarantee you, on the authority of the Word of God and on the testimony of Christians when they were dying, that you will not be sorry when your appointed day arrives.