

Lesson 6 2 Kings 1-2

I. 1 Kings 22:41-53

- A. Chapter 15 was the last time we heard about what was going on in Judah. But then, compared to Israel, not much had been happening in Judah.
- B. Asa's reign of 41 years and given way to the 25 year reign of his son, Jehoshaphat. And, we are told, Jehoshaphat, like his father, did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.
- C. The one negative note is that the high places had not been removed. (Chapter 15 tells us that his father, Asa, similarly failed to remove the high places.)
- D. But Jehoshaphat is considered to have had a good reign because of his reforms – he worked toward returning the nation to the proper path.
 - 1. Jehoshaphat was a restorer! (2 Chronicles 19:4 So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the LORD God of their fathers.)
 - 2. There are many examples of restoration in the Old Testament. Josiah and Nehemiah, for example, each turned to the Word of God and worked to restore the proper pattern for worship and obedience that they found in that Word.
 - 3. Today we hear a lot about the Restoration Movement from some circles, particularly from those who want to convince us that the church of Christ is just a denomination that sprang to life in the 18th century. Those who make such claims display their ignorance of the church and its nature. The church of Christ is no more a product of the Restoration Movement than Judaism was a product of the restorations undertaken by Josiah, Nehemiah, or Jehoshaphat.
 - 4. For more on this topic, see [Lesson 8](#) in our series on the church at www.thywordistruth.com. Also, see [Lesson 4](#) on misconceptions about the Lord's church.
- E. The peace with the Northern kingdom had been sealed by the gift of Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, to Jehoshaphat's son. (2 Chron. 18:1) The

details of Jehoshaphat's wars against Edom and Ammon and his judicial and military reforms are found in 2 Chron. 17-19.

- F. Finally, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, becomes king of Israel, and nothing in this description of his reign is surprising. Like father (and mother), like son.

II. 2 Kings 1

- A. The second book of Kings follows the first without a break. Originally, this was a single book, generally attributed in authorship to Jeremiah. It was eventually split into two books because of its length.
- B. When 2 Kings opens, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, is king of Israel. And Ahaziah, like his father, is about to meet Elijah.
- C. Ahaziah has two problems:
 1. First, Moab rebels against Israel, an issue that we will see again in Chapter 3. But this is not his biggest problem.
 2. Second, Ahaziah has fallen through a lattice in an upper room and injured himself. Interestingly, even this injury, like his other problems, can be traced to a departure from the word of God.
 3. The Law of Moses included what must be one of the earliest building codes in history. (Deuteronomy 22:8 When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.)
- D. His reaction to the injury is to send messengers to consult Baal-Zebub (one of the many manifestations of Baal) about his fate.
 1. Like many facing sudden difficulties in life, Ahaziah suddenly becomes very spiritual, but, immersed in the false religion of his parents, he turns to a false god for help.
 2. Baal-Zebub was the god of Ekron, a Philistine city about 25 miles west of Jerusalem.
 - a) Why didn't the king simply consult the local priests of Baal? Perhaps he wanted to keep his injury a secret from his political rivals and enemies. Also, this particular false god may have had a special reputation for divination.

3. Baal-Zebub is literally "Baal, Lord of Flies." That name may be a deliberate corruption of Baal-Zebul, which would mean "Baal the exalted" or "Baal the prince."
 4. The only time this name appears in the Old Testament is in this chapter, where it appears 4 times. It does appear again, however, in the New Testament.
 5. In the gospels, Baal-Zebub is referred to as the ruler of demons. (Matthew 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, 19.) Perhaps this false lord of the flies became a breeding ground for the truly demonic in the same way a dead animal becomes a breeding ground for actual flies.
 6. Paul explained it this way: (1 Corinthians 10:19-20) What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.
 7. For whatever reason, commentators are correct when they note that "the Old Testament figure of Baal stands explicitly behind the New Testament figure of Satan." Satan, no doubt, was behind the Old Testament figure of Baal as well. Satan's most powerful weapon is idolatry – both then and now!
- E. In response to the king's messenger to Baal, God also send a messenger.
1. God usually spoke directly to Elijah. Why send a messenger here? Perhaps God wanted to show the contrast between His messenger and Ahaziah's messenger.
 2. The messenger is called the Angel of the Lord, and we could spend a great deal of time here studying this very intriguing character from the Old Testament.
 - a) The Angel of the Lord makes numerous appearances in the Old Testament, and very often he speaks as God rather than for God.
 - b) For example, who appeared to Moses from the burning bush? Exodus 3:2 tells us that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush, and Exodus 3:4 tells us that God spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

- c) Who stayed Abraham's hand when he was about to sacrifice Isaac? Genesis 22:11 tells us that it was the Angel of the Lord who called to him from heaven.
 - d) And a final example: Judges 2:1-3 Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. 2 'And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? 3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' "
 - e) Some have speculated that these Old Testament appearances of the Angel of the Lord are pre-incarnate appearances of Christ – a so-called Christophany.
 - f) Of course, Christ is not an angel as we and the Bible generally use that term because angels are created beings and Christ is God, having neither beginning nor end. But the Hebrew word used here for "angel" means messenger or representative, and Jesus is a messenger for God the Father.
 - g) We don't have to pursue this here, but it does make a very interesting study. Perhaps Elijah spoke with Christ prior to their meeting on the Mount of Transfiguration.
- F.** This messenger from God tells Elijah to go and meet the king's messenger.
- 1. Elijah is to deliver bad news: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" "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.' "
- G.** The messenger's swift return tells the king that he had not made it all the way to Ekron, so the king asks what happened. The king receives a "sure word," but not from Baal. He receives a sure word from God, and doesn't like what he hears.
- H.** The king's reaction is typical – he dislikes the message, so he tries to capture and no doubt kill the messenger.
- 1. The king is desperate to get a reversal of the prophecy against him, and he will use massive force to do so if needed. Apparently, Ahaziah

thinks that he can control and intimidate Elijah. (Very often people in charge are surrounded all day by people they can control and intimidate, and they are often quite surprised and perplexed when they run into someone with integrity.)

2. But Elijah is not intimidated: "The heroism of godly men and women is demonstrated in their being willing to face unpleasant conditions, even threatening circumstances, with remarkable calm. They act with firm resolve, even though it means incurring personal unpopularity. Nothing deters their passion to obey their God...regardless. His message is paramount. Period."
3. Elijah could have tried to water down God's message so he would be popular with the king. Many modern preachers do that very thing when they water down God's message for the sake of their own popularity.
 - a) 2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.
 - b) Luke 6:26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.
- I. The first two groups sent by the king to capture Elijah meet an unhappy end as the prophet calls down fire from heaven to consume them. Elijah ran once, but he does not run this time.
 1. The phrase "Do not be afraid" in verse 15 shows us that Elijah's life was in danger from these groups of fifty. God was protecting his prophet and his word against this evil king and his evil kingdom.
- J. The captain of the third group accords Elijah the respect that he is due and escapes with his life.
 1. Respect for the prophets of God is a theme that we will return to at the end of Chapter 2. In this case, the captain's respectfulness saves his life and the lives of his men. Elijah returns with the troops to meet the king.
- K. Ahaziah meets with Elijah, but the meeting changes nothing. Elijah repeats his message to the king, and the king dies in verse 17.
- L. Ahaziah has no son, and so Joram (a shortened form of Jehoram) becomes the next king.

1. And who is Joram? Chapter 3:1 tells us that Joram was also a son of Ahab, and thus he was a brother of the former king, Ahaziah.
 2. Ahab's house continues, and so the prophecy of 1 Kings 21:21-22 that Ahab's entire household would be destroyed has not yet come to pass.
- M.** Verse 17 tells us that Joram of Israel succeeded Ahaziah after Jehoram of Judah succeeded his father Jehoshaphat.
1. But later in 2 Kings 3 Jehoshaphat goes to war against Jehoram of Israel. Is that a contradiction?
 2. No. What must have happened is that Jehoram became coregent with his father Jehoshaphat during the end of the latter's reign. This was often done to ensure the current king's choice of succession. In fact, some commentators believe that Jehoshaphat's 25 year reign includes a 3 year coregency with his father Asa and a 5 year coregency with his son Jehoram. (Jehoram gets a letter from Elijah in 2 Chron. 21:12.)

III.2 Kings 2:1-6

- A.** Chapter 2 begins with Elijah and Elisha taking a farewell tour to see the prophets in Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal. This chapter describes the ascension of Elijah, and the events surrounding that ascension are in some ways very puzzling.
- B.** Why, for example, does Elijah in these opening verses repeatedly try to leave Elisha behind?
1. Elijah has been told to make Elisha his successor, and Elijah (and everyone else apparently) knows this will happen today.
 2. Why at this moment does Elijah try to leave Elisha behind?
 - a) Perhaps Elijah wanted to face this experience alone.
 - b) Perhaps Elijah was testing the faithfulness of Elisha, who three times refused to leave.
 3. We know from what follows that Elijah knows that Elisha must be with him at his departure to receive his "inheritance" of the spirit. Is this perhaps another example of Elijah trying to do things his own way? Is he trying to shake Elijah off his tail so as to stall God's plans?

4. It is certainly not his leadership that causes things to work out, but rather it is the commitment of Elisha to his calling, and possibly also his personal loyalty to Elijah.
- C. The sons of the prophets or company of the prophets in verse 3 is the same group we met in 1 Kings 20:35, when the prophet who disguised himself and tricked King Ahab was said to be from this group.
1. Most likely, these sons of the prophets were schools of prophets that existed in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, possibly set up by Samuel. They would have been centers of spiritual training and worship, surrounded by paganism and evil.
 2. Sadly Gilgal and Bethel were to be condemned by prophets in the next century as centers of pagan idolatry. Perhaps these schools eventually failed to stand up for the truth as they once had. (If so, it certainly would not be the last time a school set up by God's people would drift far away from its original charter!)

IV. 2 Kings 2:7-15

- A. Both prophets arrive at the Jordan, and, in a scene that reminds us of the Exodus, the two prophets cross over the river on dry land.
1. But while Israel had crossed over the Jordan into Canaan to possess an earthly heritage, Elijah crossed over the Jordan out of Canaan to possess a heavenly heritage.
- B. Elisha then requests what an eldest son would expect of his father – a double portion as his inheritance.
1. Elisha wanted to assume the role of the eldest son, which was to carry on his father's name and work. Elisha even refers to Elijah as his father in verse 12.
- C. But Elisha does not want land – he wants spirit. Elisha knows that he will need great spiritual resources if he is to take over the responsibilities of the great prophet Elijah.
- D. Elijah promises him that he will receive that double portion, but only if he sees Elijah's departure, which Elisha does.
1. Elijah's statement in verse 10 is puzzling. How is what Elisha asks difficult for God? Or does he perhaps mean difficult for himself? But in that case wouldn't "impossible" be a better word?

2. Also, is the contingency (“if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours— otherwise not”) a real one? And if so, why again was Elijah trying to leave Elisha behind?
- E.** Verse 11 describes Elijah's departure: "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."
1. The word for chariot here may be translated in the plural, in which case perhaps a divine army came for Elijah. We will see such a divine army in 2 Kings 6.
 2. Notice that Elijah is taken up in the whirlwind, not in the chariots of fire. The chariots come between the two of them and cut him off from human sight. Not surprisingly, Elijah's departure has proven to be as spectacular as his life.
- F.** Why did God take Elijah up in this manner?
1. Remember that Baal was the god of rain, and a lack of rain was explained by saying the Baal had submitted to Mot, the god of death.
 2. In the departure of Elijah, we see that it is God who rules the storms rather than the storm god Baal, and we see that it is God rather than the false god Mot who has power over death.
 3. Baal might have to submit to the god of death, but not Elijah! He is taken to heaven in a storm, thumbing his nose at the false god of storms and the false god of death.
- G.** Elijah's departure shares some similarities with two other Old Testament figures.
1. He, like Enoch, seems to have escaped physical death. (Genesis 5:24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.)
 2. And he, like Moses, left under mysterious circumstances. (Deuteronomy 34:5-6 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. 6 And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day.)
 3. (Interestingly, the short book of Jude mentions both Moses and Enoch, and tells us that the archangel Michael contended with Satan for the body of Moses.)

4. The phrase "taken up" in verses 1 and 11 of 2 Kings 2 is distinctive language and is not explained. We are not told for certain whether Elijah's physical body died and he was "taken up" in a new spiritual body or whether his body was translated or transformed without seeing death.
 - a) We know we all have an appointment with death. (Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.)
 - b) But compare 1 Thessalonians 4:17. (Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.)
 5. Did Elisha tear his clothes because he thought Elijah was dead, or did he tear his old clothes because he had taken on a new mantle from Elijah? In the next section of the chapter, he reluctantly permits the other prophets to search for Elijah's body.
- H. Elisha is then able to repeat Elijah's parting of the waters, proving himself to be Joshua to Elijah's Moses.
1. Joshua in Joshua 3 also crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Israel. Recall that Elisha means "God saves" and Joshua means "the Lord saves." We are meant to read about Elijah and Elisha against the background of Moses and Joshua.

V. 2 Kings 2:15-18

- A. A second puzzle now confronts us: Why is the company of the prophets so intent on looking for Elijah?
1. They understand a succession has occurred because in verse 15 they understand that the spirit of Elijah is now resting on Elisha. They even bow to the ground to offer respect to Elisha. Why then do they go to such lengths to search for Elijah?
 2. The answer no doubt is that they do not really know what has happened to Elijah. The prophets, we are told in verse 7, were at a distance when Elijah was taken up. They may have seen the whirlwind and the fire, but they probably could not see what was going on in the midst of the storm.
 3. For all they know, the Spirit may have picked Elijah up and deposited him somewhere else in the vicinity. (This is exactly what Obadiah

feared would happen back in 1 Kings 18:12. Apparently, Elijah was known to disappear and reappear suddenly.)

4. Even Elisha seems uncertain enough that he permits the search.
 - a) The phrase "until ashamed" in verse 17 means "beyond measure" or "until he had not the heart to refuse."
5. Another possible explanation is that they may believe that Elijah is dead and they want to bury him properly according to Jewish law.

VI. 2 Kings 2:19-22

- A. With the two concluding events in this chapter, we leave behind all of the uncertainties about Elijah, and we focus on what is clear – Elisha has taken his place. Elisha is an authentic prophet of God – able to bless and to curse in the Lord's name.
- B. The first event concerns bad water in Jericho and its effects on the land. We are not told why Jericho had this problem, but we do recall from 1 Kings 16 that the city had been rebuilt under the shadow of Joshua's curse. It is thus fitting that this new Joshua, having crossed the Jordan, should now pronounce a blessing.
- C. The use of salt in purifying the water most likely represents a break with the past such as was declared when offerings were made holy by the rubbing of salt (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 43:24).

VII. 2 Kings 2:23-25

- A. We now come to an event that has been described as the secret fantasy of bald men everywhere! As one poet wrote: "the horrible vengeance that bears wreaked for the honor of 42 hairs!" But what really happened here?
- B. After the wondrous events of Elijah's departure and Elisha's acceptance and demonstration of his new role, the chapter ends with a stark reminder of the world that still surrounded Elisha. As he returns, he is taunted and jeered at by a gang of youths, who care nothing for God or for this man of God. These ruffians were not teasing Elisha in a good-natured way.
- C. Why the reference to baldness?
 1. It may indicate that their words were meant as a curse on Elisha. In the Old Testament, God sometimes cursed wicked men with baldness as an outward sign of their sin (Isaiah 3:24). One Old Testament

scholar has suggested that this language was an expression “of extreme contempt. They were pronouncing a divine curse upon him, for which baldness was often the outward sign.”

2. The baldness may also refer to some physical marking taken on by prophets. In this case, the insult was specifically directed to Elisha's status as a prophet. (Recall that the prophet who met Ahab along the road in 1 Kings 20:38 disguised himself by covering his head.)
- D. What about the phrase "Go up! Go up!"?
1. As we just studied, not long before this, the prophet Elijah had been carried up into heaven by God. And so when the young men screamed "Go up...Go up," they might have been expressing their wish that Elisha, too, should hurry up and leave the Earth so that they could be rid of him!
- E. In the book of 1 Kings, Bethel was increasingly being seen as the focal point of Israel's apostasy. It is therefore not surprising that we find the young men of Bethel treating the prophet of God with disrespect.
1. “Elisha was being taunted by young lads (perhaps teen-age ruffians) who as members of covenant families ought to have been taught God's law whereby cursing his servant was tantamount to cursing him and rightly punishable by death.”
- F. To treat the prophet of God with disrespect was to treat God with disrespect.
1. Leviticus 24:16 'And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.
 2. 2 Chronicles 36:15-17 And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.

3. And of course we could also move forward in history to the example of Jesus Christ himself. He was mocked and scorned by those that rejected him. Being scornful of God's messenger is serious indeed, as these young men were about to find out!
- G.** Elisha curses the youths in the name of the Lord and two bears come out of the woods and maul 42 of them.
1. Although the Hebrew word used for "tare" most likely means that death was the result, not all commentators agree that the bears necessarily killed the youths. We know only that they were mauled.
 2. We also know that this was a divine punishment. As Alfred Edersheim has written: "...it should be noticed that it was not Elisha who slew those forty-two youths, but the Lord in His Providence, just as it had been Jehovah, not the prophet, who had healed the waters of Jericho"
- H.** This section of Scripture is often cited by skeptics as a major moral problem in the Old Testament.
1. Before proceeding to discuss this alleged "moral" problem, we should say a few things about the flawed premise behind such allegations.
 - a) We live under a moral code that is higher than ourselves. We can choose to do good or we can choose to do evil. And that higher moral code determines whether what we do is good or evil.
 - b) God is not like us. God is not under some higher moral code, because there is nothing higher than God. It is incorrect to say that God chooses to do good, as if he could choose to do evil. God does what is good for the simple reason that what God does is good. He is that higher moral code under which we live. He determines what is good and what is evil.
 - c) We know from Hebrews 6:18 that it is impossible for God to lie. Does that mean that we can do something God cannot do? Yes! We can choose to disobey him and be unfaithful to him, but God cannot be unfaithful to himself.
 - d) 2 Timothy 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.
 2. With that said, the first issue we might consider is how old were these youths. Commentators are all over the map on that question.

- a) Some early Jewish rabbis argued that they were not young at all, but instead were grown men acting like children!
 - b) Two Hebrew words are used to describe the youths:
 - (1) "Qatan" meaning young, small, insignificant, or unimportant.
 - (2) "Naar" meaning boy, lad, servant, or youth.
 - c) The NIV certainly has the wrong translation here when it uses only "youths" because it has left out a word (qatan). It translates this same language as "little child" in 1 Kings 3:7 and as "boy" in 1 Kings 11:17.
 - d) But does "qatan" mean that these youths were young children or that they were unimportant? We are not told. If it does not mean young, then these "youths" could have been as old as 30. If it does, they could have been as young as 12.
 - e) The King James translation "little children" is unfortunate. We do not know for certain that they were "little children" from the Hebrew terms that are used.
3. Having now looked at the original language, we are faced with two possibilities: Either these ruffians were young children or they were not. Can we determine the answer from outside evidence?
- a) We might be tempted to say that they could not be young children because God would not do this to young children. But didn't God once send a flood to wipe out almost the entire earth – young and old alike? And is this argument an example of us trying to make God live under a moral code higher than himself?
 - b) But we do know how God feels about children because we know how Jesus felt about children, and in God there is no unChristlikeness.
 - c) In my opinion, Elisha came upon what we would call today a street gang. This gang was filled with scorn and disrespect for God and for the servants of God, and God decided to make an example of them. My guess is that they had been terrorizing the entire community, and that same community probably stood by and cheered as the bears did their business. (But then all of that is just my opinion.)

- I. The Bible has a great deal to say about the scornful. And has there ever been a time when God's word on this subject is more needed? It seems we live in a land filled with scorn and contempt. Respect has evaporated from our society.
 - 1. Proverbs 1:22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge.
 - 2. Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.
 - 3. Jude 1:17-18 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.
 - 4. Isaiah 3:4 And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.
- J. The chapter ends with Elisha traveling to Mount Carmel, the scene of Elijah's great victory over the priests of Baal.
 - 1. His prophetic credentials firmly established, Elisha is now ready to pick up where Elijah left off in the war against Baal.

VIII. Lesson for Today

- A. This series of lessons on Elijah and Elisha is really a series of lessons on a single topic: idolatry.
- B. Idolatry was a huge threat to God's plans in the days of Elijah and Elisha.
 - 1. "As long as men take on the character of the gods they serve, so long does it greatly matter who those gods may be. Had Israel embraced Baal it would have been the end of her; she would no longer have lived as the peculiar people of God. Not one scrap of her heritage would have survived." Elijah saw this danger and committed his life to removing it.
 - 2. Exodus 20:3 You shall have no other gods before Me.

3. Solomon opened the door to idolatry by marrying many foreign women and tolerating their false gods. Jeroboam opened that door wide for the entire northern kingdom. Elijah has been trying to close that door.
 4. The issue was not that Israel wanted to choose Baal over God --- Israel wanted to have both. Elijah has been calling the nation to make an either/or decision. God's people are ALWAYS people who make a choice and take a stand.
- C.** Idolatry is a huge threat to God's plans in our days as well.
1. Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
 2. What lesson is more needed in our modern society in which materialism has become the god of so many?
 3. The first duty of man is to say yes to God; the second is to say no to idols. We cannot serve both.