

2 Kings 1-2 Chapter Study

INTRO

1 & 2 Kings were originally 1 book in 2 scrolls because 1 was too large & unwieldy.

The break occurs here only to attempt an even division. There's no *narrative* reason to begin 2 Kings here.

I. Ahaziah (Israel) Chs. 1-2

Ahaziah was the son of Ahab; a wicked man who carried on in the same perverted traditions of his wicked father & mother, Jezebel.

The *fledgling empire* Ahaziah's grandfather *Omri* had begun to build and Ahab had expanded, begins now to come apart.

A. Moab Rebels 1:1

¹ Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

The regions of both Moab & Edom on the eastern borders of Israel & Judah had been made vassals of Israel under David & Solomon's reign.

But now that Israel & Judah's power were waning, they saw their opportunity to break away & assert their independence.

We'll read more about this revolt in ch. 3.

The Moabite Stone, discovered in 1868 gives archaeological verification of this rebellion.

B. Ahaziah's Death 1:2-18

1. The accident 1:2

² Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury."

Ancient windows didn't have glass, they were covered by a cloth.

To keep the cloth from blowing outward, a lattice was installed that allowed light & air in.

One day, Ahaziah was in the upper floor of his palace when he fell through a window, probably tumbling onto the ground below.

How this happened is unclear but the injuries were severe enough to cause him fear he'd die.

So he sent an official delegation 40 miles west to the Philistine city of Ekron to inquire of the chief deity there if he'd live or die.

The writer calls the idol, Baal-Zebub, but that's a slur on it's real name, which was Baal-Zebul = Lord of life.

Ahaziah was hoping an appeal to the Lord of Life would secure him favor.

The reason the author alters the idol's name from Zebul to Zebub is as a pun, a put-down & insult to this pagan deity.

Baal-Zebub means, *not* Lord of *life*, but Lord of *flies*!

This joke stayed with the Jews well past the time of Jesus, with Baalzebub becoming a title for the devil.

God was greatly displeased with Ahaziah's inquiry of this idol in Ekron about his fate when there was a proven prophet of God so close at hand in the person of Elijah.

2. Elijah's message 1:3-8

³ But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite,

Elijah had been a highly visible part of the religious & social scene in Israel throughout the reign of Ahaziah's father, Ahab.

“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?*’

Even God derisively refers to this idol as the lord of flies.

It's sad to see how people will turn *everywhere* but to God for direction & counsel in life.

They read dozens of self-help & self-improvement books.

They attend conferences all over the country.

They subscribe to magazines & journals that offer advice on everything from what to eat & wear to what to believe.

Pop-psychology & life-coaching has become a multi-billion dollar industry as people forage here & there for guidance in how to be happy & successful.

Books like “The Secret” & guys Like Tony Robbins make tens of millions but it's all foolish *vanity*.

No – it's *worse* than that: it's the stuff flies feast on.

Nearly every evening when I get home, one of the first things I do before it gets dark is to go out into the back yard where our 2 dogs, Lady & Seth spend the day.

There's always the evidence of their active digestive system there on the lawn for me to scoop up.

Some of it is pungent & covered with flies that just can't get enough.

That's a good picture of the wisdom of the world, encouraged as it is by the devil. It's all a distraction from the gracious, free counsel of God who stands ready to meet us & our need the moment we turn to Him.

As it says in Prov 3 –

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

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 departed.

God gets His word to Ahaziah, whether he wants it or not – his injuries are fatal.

The messengers have what they need so return to the king.

⁵ And when the messengers returned to him, he said to them, “Why have you come back?”

→ So quickly.

⁶ So they said to him, “A man came up to meet us, and said to us, ‘Go, return 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 Then he said to them, “What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?” 8 So they answered him, “A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist.” And he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.”

Growing up as the crown-prince, Ahaziah had seen Elijah before when he came to challenge Ahab about his evil deeds.

It had been some time since he'd seen the prophet, but the description made it clear who he was.

Elijah had been the proverbial “thorn in the side” of his father & this pronouncement of royal doom was all Ahaziah thought he needed to exact revenge on him.

As his father Ahab had done, Ahaziah thought that prophets created the future by their announcements rather than just reporting what God revealed to them.

So in his thinking, Elijah's message was a death sentence Elijah had made out of his own desires.

The only way to stop it would be to kill him before it was carried out; that would somehow *break* the prophet's curse.

3. The King's summons 1:9-16

9 Then the king sent to him a captain of 50 with his 50 men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: “Man of God, the king has said, ‘Come down!’ ”

What's missing from this is the incredibly arrogant & brutal tone conveyed by the original.

The haughtiness expressed by this commander began with Ahaziah & is expressed by both of them, not only toward Elijah, but toward Elijah's God. There is just no regard whatsoever on their part for the holiness or power of God.

In fact, there's a thick, dripping sneer of disdain on their part toward the Lord.

10So

Because of that disdain for God -

Elijah answered and said to the captain of 50, “If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.

Why fire from heaven? Because so many years since the showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel have passed, it's become no more than a *legend*.

Ahaziah needs to know that the God of Israel is as powerful now as then; He's not a myth like Baal.

But Ahaziah, like most unbelievers, is a bit dense when it comes to perceiving truth & knowing what to do.

11 Then he sent to him another captain of 50 with his 50 men. And he answered and said to him: “Man of God, thus has the king said, ‘Come down quickly!’ ”

This guy is even haughtier than the first!

12 So Elijah answered and said to them, “If I *am* a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.” And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.

Now, you would think at this point, Ahaziah would have learned the lesson these smokings were meant to teach – that God is God & deserves our respect & submission.

But he’s a total fool & sends another group to arrest & haul Elijah to court.

13 Again, he sent a third captain of 50 with his 50 men. And the 3rd captain of 50 went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: “Man of God, please let my life and the life of these 50 servants of yours be precious in your sight. ¹⁴ Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first 2 captains of 50’s with their 50’s. But let my life now be precious in your sight.”

This commander comes with a totally different attitude than the previous 2.

He shows deference & honor to Elijah, acknowledging him as an agent of the true & living God.

Because of this, he’s treated differently.

15 And the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.”

The angel’s instructions to Elijah here *imply* Elijah had *not* been acting out of mere grumpiness but at the direction of the Spirit with the previous 2 commanders.

So he arose and went down with him to the king. ¹⁶ Then he [Elijah] said to him [the king], “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.’ ”

This is EXACTLY the message Ahaziah had already received.

But he thought by dragging Elijah before his throne & threaten him, it would cause him to alter his message.

No chance, because Elijah was far more aware of standing before a *higher* throne – Yahweh’s.

4. Ahaziah dies 1:17-18

17 So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. Because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. ¹⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Now it starts to get downright confusing.

We have 2 kings, both named Jehoram – one in Israel, the other in Judah. The Jehoram that replaced Ahaziah in Israel was Ahaziah's brother, not son.

Ahab was father to both Ahaziah & Jehoram.

But Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah also had a son named Jehoram who inherited the throne.

What makes this even more complicated is that sometimes their names are shortened to Joram.

C. Elijah's Departure 2:1-18

The time has come now for Elijah's ministry to conclude & his protégé Elisha to take over.

¹ And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

It seems Elijah knew what awaited him & as he moved toward his departure followed a path through some of Israel's most important landmarks; places rich in significance regarding God's purposes for Israel.

The Spirit led him on this journey because God wanted to stamp the life & ministry firmly on the memory of His people.

You see, in some ways, Elijah was like Moses.

It was on Mt. Sinai that both men had an encounter with God & received His Word.

Just as Moses had executed the worshippers of the Golden Calf, Elijah had executed the prophets of Baal.

Both men crossed bodies of water miraculously, Moses the Red Sea; Elijah, the Jordan.

And just as Moses had met his end east of the Jordan in mysterious circumstances, so Elijah would do the same, the same area.

But the definitive pairing of Moses & Elijah comes in the NT at the Transfiguration, where both appear & speak to Jesus.

Both men were crucial in the covenant between God & Israel –

Moses was the one God used to forge it, Elijah was the one who renewed it when it had just about been eradicated by the wicked Ahab & Jezebel.

If Elijah is an echo of Moses, then we can look to his protégé who takes over for him – Elisha, to stand in the same mold as Moses protégé – Joshua.

² Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel.

One of the things we note about Joshua is that he was just about inseparable from Moses.

In the same way, Elisha let's Elijah know he's not going to be detached from him.

Gilgal where they began their trek was the place Joshua had circumcised all the males of Israel in preparation for their conquest of the Promised Land.

It marked the place of renewing their covenant with God.

Bethel was the place where God had first appeared to Jacob & promised him he

would be the father of the nation.

³ Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent!”

Scattered at various places throughout both Israel & Judah at this time were little communities of people still loyal to God.

Among them were people uniquely gifted with the word of Prophecy.

They formed what were called “schools of the prophets” & spent their time in worship & study of the scriptures.

These little communities were bastions of faith during the darkness of apostasy, just as the monasteries & convents of Europe served as the safe-keepers of culture, civilization, & faith during the Dark Ages.

There was one of these enclaves at the village of Bethel.

All the prophets there were given the same message – it was time for Elijah to wrap up his work.

They asked Elisha if he’d heard the same thing – he said he had & urged them to keep it to themselves.

They were probably badgering him about his plans & what he was going to do when his master & teacher was gone.

He didn’t know – all he knew to do was to stay alert & as close to him as possible.

⁴ Then Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” So they came to Jericho. ⁵ Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?” So he answered, “Yes, I know; keep silent!”

When they get to Jericho, the scene of Israel’s first great triumph in the conquest of Canaan, Elisha is again barraged by the prophets with the same thing as at Bethel.

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” So the 2 of them went on. ⁷ And 50 men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing *them* at a distance, while the 2 of them stood by the Jordan. ⁸ Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled *it* up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the 2 of them crossed over on dry ground.

When Elijah & Elisha headed off toward the east from Jericho, the prophets followed along, wondering where they could be going.

You can’t go very far east from Jericho without hitting the natural boundary of the Jordan River.

So this group of 50 guys followed along, keep some distance between the 2.

When they arrived at the river, they lined up to watch & see what would happen.

Elijah removed his mantle, that cloak he wore over his shoulders and used as a prayer shawl, rolled it up, then used it like a whip to strike the water.

As soon as he did the flow of the river stopped and made a passage for them to cross.

9 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?"

Now that they were on the eastern side of the Jordan, in the realm where Elijah knew he'd soon depart, he turned to his student & asked him what he wanted.

Why had he stayed with him all this time? What was he hoping for?

Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

This seems a haughty request; as though Elisha was saying, "I want to be twice as *powerful* as you."

If that's what Elisha means then he's just a power-hungry maniac.

That's NOT what he's asking for. He doesn't want twice as much POWER as Elijah, He wants a double portion of the *Spirit* Elijah had.

In other words, he wants to be *twice as close to God* as his teacher was.

He wants to be twice as effective, twice as useful, twice as yielded.

After having spent several years following Elijah, Elisha knew he was a man who was mightily used by God, but given to moodiness & periods of deep, dark despair that removed him from service.

Elijah was one of those guys who when he was on, he was unstoppable & did astounding things.

But when he was off, he was useless.

Elisha wanted to stay in the place where he was useful at all times; where his emotions never got in the way of his effectiveness.

Also, the double portion was the portion of the firstborn son.

So what Elisha was asking was to inherit Elijah's office as the chief prophet of Israel.

10 So he [Elijah] said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."

This wasn't a case of magic; it wasn't like Elisha had to be there to get Elijah's *vibe* when he was taken up.

All it means is that Elisha has to stick with him to the end.

He can't demonstrate the *moodiness* & impetuosity that would preclude him from his desire.

Elisha has already proven his consistency & steadfastness, his loyal devotion to Elijah.

But who knows how long it will be until Elijah is taken away?

Will Elisha see it through, or get bored & take off?

11 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked,

The idea that this was some time . . .

that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the 2 of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into

heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father,

the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into 2 pieces.

Couple things here –

1) Even though Elijah didn't die, because Elisha had lost his best friend and knew he would not see him anymore, he tore his clothes as a sign of intense mourning.

It's right & proper when a loved one or close friends dies, to mourn, even if their a believer.

Yes, they've gone to heave and we'll see them again, but their gone and the separation is a grief to be mourned.

If you're seeking to comfort someone who's grieving don't tell them that faith in God ought to disarm grief and heal the tears.

That's heartless & shallow counsel. A loved one has been removed from that place of companionship and that's a grief to endure that only time can heal.

Look here – Elisha knew Elijah didn't die – but he mourned his loss of friendship.

You'd be hard pressed to find a man of greater faith than Elisha.

2) Why did God take Elijah into heaven this way? Why didn't he die like everyone else?

We can't say for certain, but it's possible God has a future work for Elijah that required his being translated to heaven this way.

It's prophesied Elijah will come & renew his prophetic ministry prior to the Second Coming of the Messiah.

This is why to this day, Jews set an extra place at Passover and leave their front door ajar – just in case Elijah arrives and wants to eat Passover with them.

Many scholars and students believe Elijah is one of the 2 prophets that appear in Israel & Jerusalem during the Tribulation and lead a huge & effective evangelistic campaign among the world & especially among the Jews.

It's said they are able to call down fire form heaven, one of the hallmarks of Elijah's ministry.

13 He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.

When Elijah had come down form the cave on Mt Sinai, he'd laid that mantle on Elisha's shoulders, indicating he was to eventually take his place.

Elisha had gone home, said his good byes, & taken off after Elijah whom he then followed for years.

That mantle was the symbol of Elijah's anointing & office as chief prophet.

So Elisha picked it up and walked back to the bank of the River.

Then comes the moment of truth --

14 Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, “Where is the LORD God of Elijah?” And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.

Elisha wasn't being all haughty & presumptuous.

Until this moment, he didn't know if God had honored his request or not. His question was a sincere one – “Where is God; Is He with me as He was with my master, or not?”

God made it clear He was very much present and Elisha had now stepped into the prophet's role.

15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. 16 Then they said to him, “Look now, there are 50 strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send anyone.”

This was just silly & he knew it.

17 But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send them!” Therefore they sent 50 men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. 18 And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go’?”

These guys pushed Elisha to consent to a search party so hard that it started to look like he had something to hide.

So out of sheer frustration & embarrassment, he consented. But of course, it was a foolish venture.

D. Elisha's Ministry Begins 2:19-25

1. Healing bad water 2:19-22

19 Then the men of the city said to Elisha, “Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren.”

Jericho is located at a premium location on one of the most important trade routes through the region.

It's also on the main road that leads from Jerusalem to the east.

There are hot springs there that were much sought after in the ancient world for their therapeutic qualities.

Jericho has always been an important city for economic & military reasons.

For a good part of its time it was seen as one of the premier *resorts* of the region.

But at this time, its fresh water supply had become ruined.

20 And he said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. 21 Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.’ ” 22 So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.

The language indicates their water supply was a fresh water spring.

Somehow it had become tainted & bitter.

Even the water used for irrigation was killing their crops.

Elisha threw in a bowl of salt with an announcement from God and the water was made sweet.

Whether God actually gave Elisha some kind of physical remedy in using the salt to create a chemical reaction, or this was symbolic is unknown.

The point is, it was a miracle either way.

2. Rebels get mauled 2:23-25

23 Then he went up from there to Bethel;

He's backtracking now, going over the same path he'd taken with Elijah.

and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him,

"Youths" here is not little kids; the word refers to young men.

and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!"

These aren't innocent little kids in a moment of misbehavior; these are young adults *mocking* Elisha in a most sinister way.

You see, Bethel was the southern center of Israel's idolatry.

It's one of the 2 places Jeroboam had selected to place his image of the Golden calf, the other was up north in the city of Dan.

Elijah had been the point man in leading idolatrous Israel back to God.

His success was seen in those many little communities of faith that existed all over Israel, including in Bethel.

But there was a die-hard group of idolaters there too & they had hated Elijah with a passion!

They'd kept silent when he'd been through before because of what had happened to the 100 men Ahaziah had sent to arrest him.

Now that he's gone, & Elisha comes as his *successor*, they assume he's nothing but a figurehead; there's no way he wields the same power.

So they set to verbally abuse him, taunting him to "Go up" just as Elijah had.

They insult him as a "baldhead."

Now, unlike the hairy Elijah, Elisha was bald, but that's not what they mean; they're saying he's bald because he's one of the lepers who has to shave his head as part of dealing with his disease.

Lepers were the most despised people in all society!

So this was actually a name that expressed their absolute loathing for the man who is now THE designated representative of God.

It is for that reason, just as Elijah had called down fire to consume the arrogant commanders & their men, that Elisha, pronounced judgment on these guys.

24 So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And 2 female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths.

Notice it doesn't say the bears killed them; they mauled them – leaving them disfigured for the rest of their lives and serving as a reminder to all of what happens when you knowingly defy God.

25 Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

Carmel was of course the scene of Elijah great contest with & victory over the prophets of Baal.

All of this was meant to make it clear that Elisha was stepping in to Elijah's role & office.