

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 17, Part 1

2 Kings 1-2, Part 1

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Welcome to the continuation of our study of the Books of Kings. Today, we're transitioning from First Kings to Second Kings. As I think I may have mentioned in the last session, the clearest evidence that these are really one book is seen in the fact that the account of Ahaziah, king of Israel, the northern kingdom, starts at the very end of First Kings, chapter 22, begins there at verse 51, and then the story continues on into chapter 2, excuse me, book 2, and chapter 1, and we have the conclusion of Ahaziah's story in chapter 1, verse 18. So, the separation of the two is purely mechanical, nothing to do with content.

Let's pray as we begin.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for being in charge of the events of world history. Thank you that as we face pandemics, as we face election quandaries, as we face a variety of issues, we can rest in you, that you are the power behind all things. We thank you for the evidence of this in our study today. We pray that you will open its truth to us, apply its truth to us, give us the confidence that you are indeed the king. In your name, we pray, amen.

Our first section then is Elijah and Ahaziah, beginning in First Kings 22, 15, and continuing on to Second Kings, chapter 1, verse 18. In that last introductory paragraph at the end of chapter 22, we have Ahaziah introduced, in a typical way, that he did wrong in the eyes of the Lord.

But there's a new twist here. Up to this point, it has been, he followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that is, they worshipped Yahweh in an idolatrous way. They had built the gold idols in Bethel in the south and in Dan in the north, idols of a bull, representative of power, representative of fertility, representative of all that earth can indeed bring to bear upon human life.

But that, of course, is the problem. Yahweh is not a representative of this earth's power. Yahweh is the source of this earth's power.

He lives beyond the creation. He's not part of the creation. So that was the sin that Jeroboam led them into, the sin of idolatry.

And as I've said before in this study, that has tremendous implications. The remarkable thing about Yahweh, as the Bible depicts Him, is that He is transcendent. He is other than this creation.

Once you grant that, all kinds of things follow. We don't have time to pursue those now, but for one thing, there is purpose in creation if a creator outside of the universe brought the universe into existence. So, that purpose shines through the biblical understanding.

There is the possibility of salvation. That is, we can transcend our conditioning. We can transcend our environment.

We can become redeemed. Those are just two of the implications of transcendence. So this issue of idolatry is not merely a question, well, you either make a statue of God or you don't make a statue.

No. It is you drag the creator into this world and make him a part of the purposeless, salvationless character of this creation, or you allow him to be absolutely other than this world. And in His great divine purpose, bring the possibility of transformation upon us.

That's what Jeroboam did. But if you look at the description of Ahaziah here, you find that something more is said. This is verse 52.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. So, there's a new element added here. What was the sin of Ahaziah's father and mother, Ahab and Jezebel? It was, in fact, not merely to worship Yahweh in an idolatrous way.

It was, in fact, to displace Yahweh and bring in that God, the Canaanite God of fertility, the God Baal. So, we see here a new standard of judgment has come in and a new crisis. As I've said to you, the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, a single ministry in two phases, was focused on this question: Is Yahweh, in fact, going to be displaced? Not merely dragged into this world, but in fact, dragged out of this world, put on the shelf the crisis that is here with us.

So, we see Ahaziah. Notice that he ruled for a very short time. Now, again, we've talked about the chronology.

He may have only ruled for a little more than a year, but he ruled for parts of two years. And so, the report will be that he reigned for two years, but just two years. We're told then, at the beginning of chapter one, that he fell through a latticework in his palace and was injured.

This reminds us of the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, whose eldest son became ill. Jeroboam sent to the prophet who had anointed him, Ahijah, the

prophet of Yahweh, to find out whether his son might recover or not. Notice what Ahaziah does.

Ahaziah sends to Baalzebub, the god of Ekron. Ekron is one of the Palestine, one of the Philistine cities. So, this is not merely the Canaanite god Baal, and it's the Canaanite god Baal in a Philistine city.

So, he is not sending to a prophet of Yahweh in Israel. He's sending to a prophet of Baal in Philistia. Again, a mark of what has happened in these years of Ahab's and Jezebel's rule in Israel.

They have drifted away. And so, you have Elijah's dramatic response. These guys are on the road, headed down some 45 or 50 miles to Philistia to ask this pagan god.

And Elijah meets them and says, is there no God in Israel? Do you have to go to a foreign god in a foreign nation to ask for wisdom? Now, we don't know anything more about this god than this name here. As I mentioned, if you got the study guide, Zevuv is the word in Hebrew that means a fly, a fly. So, this is Baal of the flies, the lord of the flies, which, of course, gave the title to a novel that we perhaps remember in years past.

He only appears again in the New Testament when the rulers of the Jews accuse Jesus of being a servant of Beelzebub, who has by this time come in the Jewish tradition to represent Satan, the evil god. So, it's interesting; perhaps this Baal Zevuv is the lord of death, the flies that gather around a corpse. And perhaps that's why the question is being addressed to him.

We don't know for certain. But the key is that he's not Yahweh, and he's not even in Yahweh's land to meet them. So, interestingly, you can never ultimately avoid God.

Ahaziah didn't think about Yahweh. He didn't think about consulting Elijah. I think it never occurred to him.

But that doesn't matter, you can't avoid him. Years later, in Judah, a king who bore the same name, Ahaz, which is short for Ahaziah, was attempting to fortify his city because of the threat of his northern neighbors. Hadn't consulted God, hadn't asked what God wanted to do, hadn't asked what God's point of view was.

But here came Isaiah. You cannot avoid Yahweh. You may think you've avoided him in this life, but in the end, you will meet him.

I will meet him. You cannot avoid him. And so, the men went back to Ahaziah.

And he said, what are you doing back so soon? And they said, well, we met this guy on the road. And he said, is there no God in Israel? Maybe we ought to ask a God in Israel, king. And Ahaziah said, what do you look like? And they describe him as a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist.

And he said, oh, that's Elijah. So, what happens when you are confronted by Yahweh? Do you repent? Do you believe it? Do you say, oh, what in the world have I done? God have mercy on me. No, you send a military troop out to capture him.

Ahaziah was going to kill Elijah. That's what's going on here. The king is going to capture him and kill him.

He's going to get rid of this gadfly in his country. And so, you see the interesting story that develops. The captain of 50 men went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill.

This is verse nine. And said to him, man of God, the king says, come down. Now, that's a very interesting phrase.

Right through the Elijah, Elisha narrative, these two men are almost always referred to as the man of God. Only rarely are they called prophets. The issue of giving a prophecy is not so much the issue.

It's the issue of their character, their nature, and their relationship. Who is this person? He's a man of God. Well, that should have given that captain a little bit of concern.

Man of God. But the captain is the servant of King Ahaziah. What's going on here is a conflict between two kings.

Who is the king? Yahweh and his messenger is this man of God. Or is Ahaziah king, and his messenger is this military man? Elijah says, well, if I am a man of God, let fire fall from heaven.

That makes sense, doesn't it? What was the evidence of the conflict between Baal and Yahweh, between the two gods? Fire fell from the hand of Yahweh upon these people. Now, in the conflict between two kings, fire falls, and they die. Isn't it interesting how sin destroys our perception? On Mount Carmel, when the fire fell, the people fell on their faces and said, Yahweh is God.

Now, what happens? So, in verse 11, the king sent Elijah, another captain of 50 men. Yipes. Well, he's the king.

He says, go. So, I'll go. And now the captain said to him, man of God, this is what the king says.

Come down at once. We've toughened it. The first guy said the king says, come down.

This one says the king says, come down right now. If I'm a man of God, Elijah replied, may fire come down from heaven. Again, sin makes you dumb.

So, he sent a third man, but this man was a little smarter than his king. And so he fell on his knees before Elijah and said, please spare my life. No business about it; get right down here now.

He has recognized who the king is. It's not Ahaziah. It's Yahweh.

And so, Yahweh says, it's okay. Go ahead, go down. You don't have to be afraid of Ahaziah.

And so he went, and he told the king, verse 16, is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you've sent messengers to consult Baal Zebub, the God of Ekron because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you're lying on. You will certainly die. Notice that causal statement.

Why is he going to die? Because he has refused to recognize the Lordship of Yahweh. Would he have lived if he had indeed consulted Yahweh? We don't know that. But what the statement is, because you have not consulted Yahweh, you're going to die.

So, what is the lesson for you and me here? Surely, it is when we are confronted with clear evidence that Yahweh is God. That's the time. Two things.

Repent and believe. That's what Jesus said in Mark chapter 1, verse 15. Repent and believe the good news.

The good news is that God has come to establish his kingdom of salvation upon the earth. Repent and believe. Ahaz did neither of those.

He did not turn around and say, I was a fool. To consult a foreign God in a foreign land. He did not believe that Yahweh is truly the king of the universe.

As a result, he died. So for you and me, the word is repent and believe, and you shall be saved. Yes, that's the good news.