

1 Kings 20**Ahab's Wars with Syria**

20 Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together. Thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and closed in on Samaria and fought against it. ² And he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad: ³ 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your best wives and children also are mine.'"⁴ And the king of Israel answered, "As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have."⁵ The messengers came again and said, "Thus says Ben-hadad: 'I sent to you, saying, "Deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children."⁶ Nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants and lay hands on whatever pleases you and take it away.'"

⁷ Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, "Mark, now, and see how this man is seeking trouble, for he sent to me for my wives and my children, and for my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him."⁸ And all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent."⁹ So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you first demanded of your servant I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" And the messengers departed and brought him word again. ¹⁰ Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me."¹¹ And the king of Israel answered, "Tell him, 'Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off.'" ¹² When Ben-hadad heard this message as he was drinking with the kings in the booths, he said to his men, "Take your positions." And they took their positions against the city.

Ahab Defeats Ben-hadad

¹³ And behold, a prophet came near to Ahab king of Israel and said, "Thus says the Lord, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the Lord."¹⁴ And Ahab said, "By whom?" He said, "Thus says the Lord, By the servants of the governors of the districts." Then he said, "Who shall begin the battle?" He answered, "You."¹⁵ Then he mustered the servants of the governors of the districts, and they were 232. And after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand.

¹⁶ And they went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings who helped him. ¹⁷ The servants of the governors of the districts went out first. And Ben-hadad sent out scouts, and they reported to him, "Men are coming out from Samaria."¹⁸ He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive. Or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

¹⁹ So these went out of the city, the servants of the governors of the districts and the army that followed them. ²⁰ And each struck down his man. The Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them, but Ben-hadad king of Syria escaped on a horse with horsemen. ²¹ And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow.

²² Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, "Come, strengthen yourself, and consider well what you have to do, for in the spring the king of Syria will come up against you."

²³ And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they."²⁴ And do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in their places, ²⁵ and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.

Ahab Defeats Ben-hadad Again

²⁶ In the spring, Ben-hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. ²⁷ And the people of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went against them. The people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country. ²⁸ And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because the Syrians have said, "The Lord is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys," therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'" ²⁹ And they encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle was joined. And the people of Israel struck down of the Syrians 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. ³⁰ And the rest fled into the city of Aphek, and the wall fell upon 27,000 men who were left.

Ben-hadad also fled and entered an inner chamber in the city. ³¹ And his servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads and go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life." ³² So they tied sackcloth around their waists and put ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please, let me live.'" And he said, "Does he still live? He is my brother." ³³ Now the men were watching for a sign, and they quickly took it up from him and said, "Yes, your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go and bring him." Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot. ³⁴ And Ben-hadad said to him, "The cities that my father took from your father I will restore, and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." And Ahab said, "I will let you go on these terms." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

A Prophet Condemns Ben-hadad's Release

³⁵ And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the Lord, "Strike me, please." But the man refused to strike him. ³⁶ Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down." And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and struck him down. ³⁷ Then he found another man and said, "Strike me, please." And the man struck him—struck him and wounded him. ³⁸ So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. ³⁹ And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent^[a] of silver.'" ⁴⁰ And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." ⁴¹ Then he hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. ⁴² And he said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction,^[b] therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people.'" ⁴³ And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

1 KINGS 20

POWER TO REBUKE THE HALFHEARTED

The power of God worked patiently on behalf of Elijah, even when he was downhearted. But the power of God had no patience with **King Ahab, who wanted to serve Baal with his wife and claim at the same time to be a follower of the Lord.** This spiritual nonsense left Ahab insensitive to the will of God and open to His judgment.

The old king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, brought a force of thirty-two city-kings and their armies, along with horses and chariots, to besiege King Ahab in Samaria (1 Kin. 20:1). What were the original terms of surrender that Ahab found acceptable? (1 Kin. 20:2–4)

[Syncretism: the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. **8831**

syncretism

The incorporation into religious faith and practice of elements from other religions, resulting in a loss of integrity and assimilation to the surrounding culture.^{1]}

What additional terms of surrender from the Syrian forces did Ahab and his advisers reject? (1 Kin. 20:5–9)

What was the diplomatic and military situation after Ahab refused Syrian officials permission to search Samaria and take anything they wanted? (1 Kin. 20:10–12)

How did King Ahab respond initially to the prophet of the Lord who promised deliverance from the Syrian siege force? (1 Kin. 20:13–15)

How did the battle unfold between the Israelite liberators and the Syrian siege force? (1 Kin. 20:16–21)

What promise did the prophet of the Lord give Ahab after Samaria was liberated from the Syrians? (1 Kin. 20:22)

What was the Syrian strategy following their defeat at Samaria? (1 Kin. 20:23–25)

What was the battle situation the following spring when the new Syrian army set up base camp at Aphek in the plains of Israel? (1 Kin. 20:26, 27)

What message did the Lord send through “a man of God” (evidently a different prophet from the year before) to Ahab about the invading Syrians? (1 Kin. 20:28)

What was the outcome of the battle on the plains near Aphek? (1 Kin. 20:29, 30)

What was the political outcome of the defeat of the second Syrian army by the divinely aided forces of Israel? (1 Kin. 20:31–34)

Yet a third prophet of the Lord, one of the “sons of the prophets,” now brought another message to King Ahab from the Lord. What are the first clues that the message from the Lord to Ahab is not a pleasant one? (1 Kin. 20:35–37)

The disguised prophet pretended to be a wounded soldier who had been charged to guard a prisoner with his life. Supposedly the prisoner had escaped and the soldier feared being executed for dereliction of duty. The king had no sympathy for a soldier who had let a prisoner get away (1 Kin. 20:38–40). How did the prophet apply his mini-drama to King Ahab? (1 Kin. 20:41, 42)

¹ Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.

How did King Ahab react to the well-deserved rebuke of the prophet of God? (1 Kin. 20:43)

BEHIND THE SCENES

The “sons of the prophets” was a designation for an association of prophets-in-training during the time of the monarchy. This is the first use of this title for this band of prophets, although they probably appeared in the story of King Saul’s coronation (1 Sam. 10:9–13). “Son” did not imply physical relationship, but spiritual relationship. Young prophets associated with experienced prophets for accountability, discipleship, and apprenticeship. Elisha especially invested time and energy in ministering to these younger prophets.

FAITH ALIVE

Why does God continue to extend His grace to unbelievers and backsliders when it seems as though they have no intention of responding to Him in faith?

When do you think the patience of the Lord ends with the unrepentant and His judgment begins?

What should you learn from the attitudes and behavior of the Lord in terms of your own response to unbelievers and backslider²

1 KINGS 21

Naboth's Vineyard

21 Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ² And after this Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.” ³ But Naboth said to Ahab, “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” ⁴ And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food.

⁵ But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?” ⁶ And he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” ⁷ And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹ And she wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. ¹⁰ And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed^[a] God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” ¹¹ And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, ¹² they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. ¹³ And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed

² Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1998). [*Receiving or Refusing God's Glory: A study of 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles*](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. ¹⁴ Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

¹⁵ *As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” ¹⁶ And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.*

The Lord Condemns Ahab

¹⁷ *Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ¹⁸ “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. ¹⁹ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Have you killed and also taken possession?’” And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.”’”*

²⁰ *Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. ²¹ Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. ²² And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. ²³ And of Jezebel the Lord also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ ²⁴ Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”*

Ahab's Repentance

²⁵ *(There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lordlike Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. ²⁶ He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel.)*

²⁷ *And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. ²⁸ And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹ “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”*

Lesson 6—The Humility of Glory

**1 Kings 21–2 Kings 1; 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3
(874–847 B.C.)**

“Power corrupts,” the old saying goes, “and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Perhaps a new saying could go: “Glory humbles, and absolute glory humbles absolutely.”

When the queen of Sheba saw the splendor of Solomon’s court, “there was no more spirit in her” (1 Kin. 10:1–5). When the prophet Isaiah had a vision in the temple and saw the Lord in all His glory attended by the seraphim, he detested his own sinfulness (Isa. 6:1–5). When the apostle John was in the Spirit on the island of Patmos and saw the resurrected Lord Jesus, he fell at His feet as though dead (Rev. 1:10–17).

After Job challenged the Lord to justify the suffering he was enduring, the Lord appeared to him. All Job could say after seeing the glory of God was, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, / But now my eye sees You. / Therefore I abhor myself, / And repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5, 6).

In 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the prophets of God kept the kings of Israel and Judah aware of the glory of God. The wise kings responded in humility.

HUMILITY OF REPENTANCE

King Ahab was a thoroughly despicable man. He ruined himself and his people with idolatry. He let his evil wife Queen Jezebel dominate him. He pouted when he didn't get his way. He hated the prophets of God—killing many and hounding Elijah relentlessly. But remarkably, when Ahab sank to his worst, the glory of God's prophetic word wrung repentance from even his hard heart.

Describe the situation and the disagreement that provide the setting for 1 Kings 21. (vv. 1–3)

BIBLE EXTRA

Read Leviticus 25:23–28 and Numbers 36:7–9 and explain why Naboth the Jezreelite did not want to sell his vineyard or exchange it for a better one.

How did King Ahab respond to Naboth's refusal to sell his vineyard? What does this reveal about the king of Israel? (1 Kin. 21:4, compare 20:43)

How did Jezebel contrast with Ahab in her approach to problems? (1 Kin. 21:5–7)

How did Queen Jezebel go about solving the problem created by Naboth's refusal to sell King Ahab his vineyard adjacent to the royal residence in Jezreel? (1 Kin. 21:8–10)

What kind of guilt would you assign to each of these in the murder-disguised-as-execution of Naboth the Jezreelite? (1 Kin. 21:7–14)

- The two scoundrels who gave false testimony
- The elders and nobles who carried out Jezebel's orders
- Queen Jezebel, who devised and ordered the murder
- King Ahab, who closed his eyes but loaned his name to it all

How did Queen Jezebel and King Ahab react to the execution/murder of Naboth? (1 Kin. 21:15, 16)

How did the Lord and Elijah His prophet react to the execution/murder of Naboth? (1 Kin. 21:17–19)

How had King Ahab's perception of the prophet Elijah changed in the time since the drought and famine? (compare 1 Kin. 21:20 with 18:17)

Because of the abuse of royal power in ordering Naboth's execution, what was God's sentence on each of these?

- King Ahab (1 Kin. 21:19, 21)
- King Ahab's descendants (1 Kin. 21:21, 22, 24)
- Queen Jezebel (1 Kin. 21:23)

What was the final biblical assessment of the overall reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel? (1 Kin. 21:25, 26)

In spite of Ahab's great wickedness and its far-reaching, long-lasting effects on Israel and Judah, what surprising results arose from this encounter of King Ahab with the glorious power of Elijah's prophetic word from God? (1 Kin. 21:27–29)

FAITH ALIVE

When in the past have you been moved to recognize your own sinfulness because you have glimpsed the glory of God's holiness and power?

How in the past have you sensed the Spirit of God using the power of the Word of God to convict you of sin?

CLOSED: IS 6:1-5; RE 1:10=17; JOB 42:5-6

We ended in this great spirit of contemplation...

Have you ever had an experience like these, where the LORD reveals Himself to you in such a way all you can do is worship, repent, be slain in His presence (slain in the Spirit)?

Ask. Ask Him for more of Him. Just like with Grace, He gives freely. We do not earn His Grace. Ask for more of Him.

HUMILITY OF THE TRUTH

The glory of God that shone through the prophecy of Elijah caused King Ahab to respond humbly in repentance. The glory of God that shone through the prophecy of Micaiah forced King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah to humble themselves before the truth. One king humbled himself while in terror he might die, the other while his life ebbed away.

What precipitated the next conflict between the northern kingdom of Israel and its Syrian neighbors farther to the northeast? (1 Kin. 22:2, 3)

Why did Jehoshaphat agree so readily to ally Judah with Ahab and Israel against Syria? (1 Kin. 22:4; 2 Chr. 18:1-3)

What was the difference between the approaches of the two kings in discerning the will of God about the impending battle with the Syrians? (1 Kin. 22:5-8; 2 Chr. 18:4-7)

Describe the scene into which Micaiah the prophet was brought from prison to prophesy. (1 Kin. 22:9-12; 2 Chr. 18:8-11)

Why do you think Micaiah gave Ahab a sarcastic prophecy promising him success at Ramoth Gilead? (1 Kin. 22:13-16; 2 Chr. 18:12-15)

What did Micaiah the prophet reveal to Ahab in each of his vision reports?

1. The sheep without a shepherd (1 Kin. 22:17; 2 Chr. 18:16)
2. The lying spirit (1 Kin. 22:18-23; 2 Chr. 18:17-22)

BEHIND THE SCENES

Ahab and the false prophets wanted to believe a lie more than they really wanted the Lord's will. God is not the father of lies; the devil is (John 8:44). So God permitted an evil spirit to accomplish what Satan is always intent on doing.

What was the response of King Ahab and his horde of false prophets to Micaiah's message? (1 Kin. 22:24-28; 2 Chr. 18:23-27)

How did each of these factors fit together to fulfill the prophetic Word of the Lord through Micaiah? (1 Kin. 22:29-34; 2 Chr. 18:28-33)

- The protective scheme of Ahab and Jehoshaphat
- The strategy of the Syrian leaders
- What appeared to be a random incident

When do you think each of these kings realized that the prophetic word they had heard from the Lord was the truth which he should have paid more attention to?

- King Jehoshaphat of Judah

- King Ahab of Israel

How were these prophecies fulfilled by the battle between the Israelites and Syrians at Ramoth Gilead? (1 Kin. 22:35–38; 2 Chr. 18:34)

- Micaiah's vision of sheep without a shepherd (see 1 Kin. 22:17)
- Micaiah's vision of the lying spirit (see 1 Kin. 22:20–23)
- Elijah's prediction of Ahab's death (see 1 Kin. 21:19)

FAITH ALIVE

Why do you think so many people today—even some in the church—have little or no respect for the truth of God's Word?

How does the truth of God's Word end up humbling those who ignore it and live according to a lie?

What aspect of the truth of God's Word are you tempted to ignore in favor of selfish ends? How can you affirm your resolve to humble yourself before the truth?

HUMILITY OF PRAISE

Typically we think of praise as an uplifting spiritual experience. There are times, however, when our praise reminds us of how high above us the Lord God is and our praise humbles us before His majesty. King Jehoshaphat had an experience in which praise opened the way for the power of God to deliver him. That kind of praise humbles a person too.

You will notice that 1 Kings has little to say about Jehoshaphat, even though he was one of the most righteous kings of Judah. The author of 1 Kings focused on King Ahab and the prophets who opposed him to the virtual exclusion of Jehoshaphat. The chronicler, however, devoted four chapters to Jehoshaphat.

In the summary of Jehoshaphat's reign given in 1 Kings 22:41–50, what are the accomplishments and failures listed? (see also 2 Chr. 20:31–37)

- Accomplishments
- Failures

How did the chronicler assess the spiritual quality of the early portion of King Jehoshaphat's reign over Judah? (2 Chr. 17:3–9)

What was the political and military situation for Judah in the early portion of King Jehoshaphat's twenty-five year reign? (2 Chr. 17:1, 2, 10–19)

King Jehoshaphat's campaign with King Ahab of Israel against Ramoth Gilead separated an early time of enthusiasm for the Lord from a second, renewed zeal for Him. How did the Lord get Jehoshaphat's attention so that the king became eager to serve Him again? (2 Chr. 19:1–3)

What innovations in the countryside did King Jehoshaphat make in his second round of reforms in Judah? (2 Chr. 19:4–7)

What innovations did King Jehoshaphat make in the city of Jerusalem? (2 Chr. 19:8–11)

In these reforms, how did justice and godliness complement one another? (2 Chr. 19:4–11)

Make a list of the qualities necessary for justice King Jehoshaphat commended to the various judges he appointed. Why is justice so hard to administer fairly? (2 Chr. 19:7, 9, 11)

What situation developed to test the depth of Jehoshaphat's commitment to the Lord? (2 Chr. 20:1, 2)

BEHIND THE SCENES

Verse 2 says the massive invading army came from Syria. The Hebrew words for Syria and Edom are extremely similar. *Aram* and *Edom* differ only in the middle consonant when written without vowels as Semitic languages are. The difference between the “r” and the “d” characters in Hebrew is the little tail or serif that Jesus referred to as a “tittle”—the smallest part of a letter (Matt. 5:18). It appears in 2 Chronicles 20 that the invaders came from Edom rather than Syria and that an ancient scribe confused the names.

How did King Jehoshaphat prepare to face the threat of the invading armies from Moab, Ammon, and their allies? (2 Chr. 20:3–5)

How did Jehoshaphat pray about each of these topics? (2 Chr. 20:5–13)

- The character of God
- The temple
- The invaders

KINGDOM EXTRA

Fasting was one of the keys to releasing the deliverance Judah experienced. This was a proclaimed fast in which the whole nation participated. Fasting is not a tool by which one manipulates God to accomplish something. Fasting is simply an outward indication of an inward sincerity, evidence of the urgency we feel when praying for special needs.

A second key integral to Judah’s deliverance was prayer. Verse 12 gives the essence of the prayer of helplessness: “For we have no power ... nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” The cry of Christians in the darkest night of their experience is: “Lord, I do not know what to do, but I am counting on You.”

What message did the Spirit of the Lord give Jahaziel the Levite? (2 Chr. 20:14–17)

How did the king and his subjects respond to the prophetic promise of deliverance from their invading enemies? (2 Chr. 20:18, 19)

How did King Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel go out to meet the invading armies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom? (2 Chr. 20:19–21)

KINGDOM EXTRA

Man was created to live and breathe in an atmosphere of praise-filled worship to his Creator. The avenue of sustained inflow of divine power was to be kept by the sustained outflow of joyous and humble praise to his Maker. Upon receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, daily living calls us to prayer and the Word for fellowship and wisdom in living. Our daily approach to God in that communion is to be paved with praise: “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise” (Ps. 100:4). Such a walk of praise-filled openness to Him will cultivate deep devotion, faithful obedience, and constant joy.

What happened to the invading Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites when the choirs of Judah began praising the Lord and the beauty of holiness? (2 Chr. 20:22–25)

How did King Jehoshaphat and the “army” of Judah conclude their “battle” against the invaders from Moab, Ammon, and Edom? (2 Chr. 20:26–28)

KINGDOM EXTRA

As Judah began to sing and praise God with the expectancy that He would fight for them, their enemies were defeated. Similar praise-induced victories occur in Joshua 6:10, 20; Judges

7:18–22; 2 Kings 7:3–16; and 19:35. Psalm 22:3 explains that God is enthroned in the praises of His people. Whenever and wherever God’s people praise Him, He reigns among them and does miraculous things on their behalf.

What were the long-term results of the victory of Judah and Jehoshaphat over their enemies by means of singing the praise of the Lord? (2 Chr. 20:29, 30)

Second Kings records a later war with Moab in which Jehoshaphat allied himself with King Jehoram of Israel. Read 2 Kings 3:1–27. How did the lessons Jehoshaphat learned during the earlier war help prevent disaster for the combined armies of Israel and Judah?

FAITH ALIVE

What are your favorite songs of praise that you sing at church or in your personal worship? How do those songs humble you before the exalted Lord as one totally dependent on Him?

What difficulties and struggles are you facing now that are opportunities in which you can practice the holy warfare of praising the Lord and the beauty of holiness? How can you exercise praise in these circumstances?

HUMILITY OF JUDGMENT

While Judah was blessed with the reign of Jehoshaphat, Israel was cursed with the reign of Ahab’s son Ahaziah. King Ahaziah experienced the glory of God through the ministry of the prophet Elijah. Ahaziah was not wise enough to respond to God’s glory, but he had an army officer who did humble himself in the face of the fierce judgment of God.

What were the general characteristics of the reign of King Ahaziah over the northern kingdom of Israel? (1 Kin. 22:51–2 Kin. 1:1)

Ahaziah’s reign was brief because he experienced tragedy early in his reign when he fell through the lattice-work window on the second story of his house in Samaria (2 Kin. 1:2). What were the missions of the two messengers dispatched because of Ahaziah’s accident?

- The messenger Ahaziah sent (2 Kin. 1:2)
- The messenger the Lord sent (2 Kin. 1:3, 4)

King Ahaziah seems to have suspected that it was Elijah the Tishbite who had intercepted his messenger. Why do you think the king suspected it had been Elijah? (2 Kin. 1:5–7)

How did the messenger identify the unknown prophet of doom as Elijah? (2 Kin. 1:7, 8)

From the way the story unfolds, what seems to have been the reason for sending an officer with fifty soldiers to find Elijah? (2 Kin. 1:9)

What was the message the Lord was sending to King Ahaziah when He twice sent fire from heaven to consume the fifty-man squads sent to arrest His prophet Elijah? (2 Kin. 1:9–12)

Why didn’t the Lord direct Elijah to call down fire to consume the third officer with his squad of soldiers? (2 Kin. 1:13–15)

What was the outcome of King Ahaziah’s indifference to the Lord and His prophet Elijah? (2 Kin. 1:17, 18)

FAITH ALIVE

When you sense the Lord’s displeasure with some sin in your life, which of these is your typical first response?

- a. Anger that He would oppose my will.

- b. Frustration with the restrictive nature of holiness.
- c. Hope that no one finds out I've been sinning.
- d. Interest in lining up my life with God's ways.
- e. Sorrow that I have offended my Lord.

What is the most serious chastening from God you have experienced because of sin? What did you learn from it?³

SONS OF THE PROPHETS (בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים, *veneï-hannevi'im*). Members of one or more prophetic guilds that existed during the time of Elijah and Elisha.

Overview

The nine biblical occurrences of the phrase “sons of the prophets” all occur within 12 chapters of 1 and 2 Kings (between 1 Kgs 20–2 Kgs 9). In these chapters, the phrase refers to a prophetic order, guild, or school (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 229; Williams, “Prophetic ‘Father,’ ” 344; Price, “Schools of the Sons,” 244). Lewis argues that unlike the priesthood and royal family, membership in this guild was not hereditary, and as such the term “son” denotes not a biological relationship but rather one of socioreligious status (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 230). Members of this prophetic guild were social, religious, and political reformers. Oladejo suggests they may have formed a separate social class from “ordinary Jews, priests, and kings” (Oladejo, “Prophetic Guilds,” 117). The guild apparently operated primarily—if not solely—in the northern kingdom of Israel (Williams, “Prophetic ‘Father,’ ” 345).

The Sons of the Prophets in 1 and 2 Kings

The phrase “sons of the prophets” first appears in 1 Kgs 20:35 without any introduction. The passage records that “a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the Lord, ‘Strike me, please’ ” (1 Kgs 20:35 ESV). When the second member refused, the first member prophesied that the man would be mauled by a lion (1 Kgs 20:36). First Kings 20:38 refers to this same member of the sons of the prophets as “the prophet” (1 Kgs 20:38), and in 1 Kgs 20:41, King Ahab of Israel recognizes him as one “of the prophets.” In this context, the term “prophet” connotes a member of the sons of the prophets; however, this connotation is not universal, as other prophets (e.g., of Baal) received no such designation (Lewis, “ ‘A Prophet’s Son,’ ” 231).

The Sons of the Prophets and Elijah’s Ascension

The prophetic guild(s) play a significant role in the story surrounding Elijah’s ascent into heaven and his passing of the prophetic mantle to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:1–18). In the opening verses of 2 Kings, two groups of the sons of the prophets—one from Bethel, the other from Jericho—warn Elisha of Elijah’s immanent departure (2 Kgs 2:3–5). Elisha responds to both groups with the statement, “I know it, too; be silent” (2 Kgs 2:3, 5 JPS).

³ Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1998). [*Receiving or Refusing God’s Glory: A study of 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles*](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Later, Elijah offers Elisha a parting gift at the Jordan River, with 50 members of the sons of the prophets of Jericho waiting nearby (2 Kgs 2:7–9, 15). Elisha requests a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, the spiritual equivalent of a firstborn’s birthright (2 Kgs 2:9). The father-son metaphor expands when, upon Elijah’s ascension, Elisha exclaims, “My father, my father” (2 Kgs 2:12). He then takes up Elijah’s mantle and returns to take charge of the sons of the prophets at Jericho (2 Kgs 2:12–18).

Elijah/Elisha’s Role among the Sons of the Prophets

The Elisha narratives seem to portray Elisha as the leader of these sons of the prophets. For example:

- A widow of one of the sons of the prophets refers to her deceased husband as Elisha’s servant (2 Kgs 4:1).
- Elisha presides over an assembly of the sons of the prophets during a famine, providing food for them (2 Kgs 4:38).
- Elisha’s servant alleges that Elisha had employed two military-aged sons of the prophets (2 Kgs 5:22).
- Elisha employs one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu as king in his stead (2 Kgs 9:1).

However, the relationship between the sons of the prophets and Elijah/Elisha remains debated. Williams and Price consider the sons of the prophets to have been an organized group under Elijah’s—and later, Elisha’s—authority (Williams, “Prophetic ‘Father,’ ” 345; Price, “Schools of the Sons,” 247). They argue that Eijah’s passing on his mantle and a double portion of his spirit to Elisha may symbolize Elisha’s status as the firstborn son of the prophets who became the head of the household upon his father’s death (Price, “Schools of the Sons,” 247). Williams also argues that the accounts of the Lord commanding Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Aram, Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha as his successor suggests that Elijah held a leadership role (1 Kgs 19:15–21; Williams, “Prophetic ‘Father,’ ” 345). Similarly, Elisha’s later anointing of Jehu by means of his servant, an anonymous son of the prophets, suggests that he held a leadership role (2 Kgs 9:1–13)

Against this view, Lewis points out that the text never refers to Elisha as a son of the prophets (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 233). He further refutes the argument that Elijah’s use of the phrase “my father” in addressing Elijah communicates that he was a member of Elijah’s guild. Rather, Lewis argues that this phrase is a common honorary address, noting that King Jehoram of Israel, who is not a member of the guild, addresses Elisha as “my father” (2 Kgs 6:21; Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 233). Lewis thus concludes “that one should think of a ‘prophetic father’ as a leader or teacher of the (sons of the prophets) as a distinctive designation appears to be a case that goes beyond the supporting evidence” (Lewis, “ ‘A Prophet’s Son,’ ” 233).

Sons of the Prophets outside 1 and 2 Kings

Although the phrase “sons of the prophets” does not occur in the Old Testament outside the books of Kings, Price and Williams have hypothesized that Samuel was the first “father” of a prophetic guild that later became known as the “sons of the prophets” (Price, “Schools of the Sons,” 247; Williams, “Prophetic ‘Father,’ ”346). As support, they point to 1 Sam 19:20, which records that Saul’s messengers, whom Saul had sent to Ramah to capture David, “saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them” (ESV). This school of prophets under Samuel seems to have held similar functions to the sons of the prophets

in 1 and 2 Kings. As further support they note that elsewhere in 1 Samuel, Samuel is addressed as “father,” as was Elijah (1 Sam 10:10; 2 Kgs 2:12). However, Lewis finds these arguments insufficient (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 233).

The prophet Amos, writing nearly a century after the last Old Testament reference to the sons of the prophets (2 Kgs 9:1), claims to be neither “a prophet, nor . . . the son of a prophet” (Amos 7:14). The exact significance of this statement is debated. Luther was the first to link Amos’ statement to the prophetic guild of 1 and 2 Kings—a suggestion that many commentators assume without explanation (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 237). An alternative suggestion is that Amos is denying that his father was a prophet. However, Lewis finds this suggestion implausible (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 233). In Lewis’ view, the most probable explanation is that the writer of Amos is using synonymous parallelism, a standard of Hebrew poetry common throughout the prophetic books that employs two different phrases to connote the same general idea (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 235–40). Under this view, Amos is not contrasting himself with an antiquated prophetic guild but is instead poetically and emphatically saying that his background is one of herdsmanship and husbandry, not prophecy.

In Acts 3:25, Peter tells his audience, “you are the sons of the prophets.” This statement is likely unrelated to the prophetic guild of 1 and 2 Kings. Instead, Peter seems to be describing those who hear and obey the words of the prophets (Lewis, “A Prophet’s Son,” 230).

Bibliography

- Lewis, Jack P. “‘A Prophet’s Son’ (Amos 7:14) Reconsidered.” *Restoration Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2007): 229–40.
- Oladejo, Olusayo Bosun. “Prophetic Guilds in the Old Testament as a Paradigm for Socio-Political Transformation in Africa.” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 16, no. 3 (2011): 115–36.
- Price, Ira M. “The Schools of the Sons of the Prophets.” *The Old Testament Student* 8, no. 7 (1889): 244–49.
- Williams, James G. “Prophetic ‘Father’: A Brief Explanation of the Term ‘Sons of the Prophets.’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 3 (1996): 344–48.

JEREMIAH K. GARRETT⁴

2 Kings

1:1–18 The narrative of 1–2 Kings was originally one work that was divided in antiquity, likely because its length required two scrolls. Second Kings begins shortly after King Ahab’s death (853 BC). Ahab’s son, Ahaziah, is now reigning over the northern kingdom of Israel. (In 930 BC, the kingdom was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south.)

⁴ Garrett, J. K. (2016). [Sons of the Prophets](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, . . . W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Second Kings continues the contrast between apostasy of the Israelite kings and Elijah's zeal for Yahweh (1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 2). Here, the story of Elijah denouncing King Ahaziah uses repetition as a literary device. The tension mounts each time Ahaziah sends a military unit to Elijah, until the pattern of destruction by fire finally ends (2 Kings 1:15).

Introduction to 2 Kings

The Historical Books

How to Study the Bible

1:1 Moab rebelled against Israel Despite its appearance in the opening verse, the story of Moab's rebellion is put on hold until ch. 3. Apparently, Ahab had either defeated or made an alliance with Moab. See note on 3:4.

rebelled The Hebrew term used here, *pasha'*, means "to transgress," and is frequently used in legal and religious contexts. In political contexts, *pasha'* refers to the rebellion of a vassal king against his overlord (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:19; compare 2 Kgs 3:5).

1:2 Ahaziah First Kings 22:51–53 introduces Ahaziah as one of the kings of Israel who did evil in the sight of Yahweh. He reigned over Israel briefly circa 853 BC.

inquire The Hebrew word used here, *darash* (meaning "consult" or "inquire"), is a technical term for inquiring of an oracle.

Old Testament Theology and Divination

Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron The name Baal-zebub literally means "lord of flies." Ekron was one of five major Philistine cities on the border of ancient Israel (Josh 13:3).

Pagan Deities in the Old Testament Table

1:3 the angel of Yahweh The Angel of Yahweh often appears with messages to individuals such as Moses (Exod 3:2), Balaam (Num 22:22–23), or Hagar (Gen 16:7–13).

Old Testament Godhead Language

the king of Samaria Refers to Ahaziah. Samaria was the capital city of Israel from the reign of Omri until its destruction at the hands of the Assyrian Empire (1 Kgs 16:24; 2 Kgs 17:6).

1:8 A hairy man The Hebrew text here reads literally as "owner of hair." The idea is that Elijah's garment was distinctive. The narrative mentions Elijah's garment several times elsewhere (1 Kgs 19:13, 19; 2 Kgs 2:8, 13, 14; compare Zech 13:4).

1:9 the commander of fifty with his fifty men A military unit comprising 50 men and their officer (1 Sam 8:12; Isa 3:3).

O man of God This title designates a true prophet or messenger of God in the book of Kings (1 Kgs 12:22; 13:21; 17:18; 2 Kgs 4:9). It also is used of Moses (Deut 33:1).

1:10 let fire come down from heaven Fire in the OT is associated with the divine presence (see note on 2 Kings 1:12). In 1 Kgs 18, divine fire provides the sign of the true God in Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:24, 38).

Fire as a Motif of Divine Presence

1:11 Come down quickly The first officer to approach Elijah did not demand that he descend “quickly” (2 Kings 1:9). The second officer commands Elijah more forcefully than the first.

1:12 the fire of God The Hebrew phrase used here, *esh-elohim*, may be understood as “fire of God” or indicate the power of the fire, as a translation “mighty fire” or “awesome fire” would imply.

1:13 let my life and the lives of your servants, these fifty, be precious in your eyes The third captain changes his approach to Elijah. Instead of coming with orders from the king, he comes humbly and asks Elijah to spare his life. He recognizes that the authority and power behind Elijah is greater than that of Ahaziah.

1:15 the angel of Yahweh See note on v. 3.

1:17 The Hebrew text of this verse can be confusing, as it lists both a king of Israel and a king of Judah who went by the same name *yehoram* (Jehoram). An alternate rendering of this name is *yoram* (Joram; 8:16). To remove the ambiguity between the king of Judah and the king of Israel, some translations always refer to the king of Israel as Joram and the king of Judah as Jehoram.

Joram became king in his place This king reigned over Israel circa 852–841 BC; he was Ahaziah of Israel’s younger brother and Ahab’s son (3:1). In the ancient Near East, the eldest son usually took the throne upon his father’s death. In the absence of a son, a brother could ascend to the throne.

the second year of Joram the son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah It is difficult to determine a precise chronology of the two kings named Jehoram (one in Israel, one in Judah). The information given in vv. 17; 3:1; and 8:16 appears to conflict. It is possible that the reference to the second year of Jehoram, king of Judah (v. 17), involves a period of coregency with his father, Jehoshaphat (who reigned ca. 873–848 BC); in that case, 8:16 would indicate the beginning of his sole reign in Judah, which would have lasted from approximately 848–841 BC.

Northern King	Date	Southern King	Date
Ahab	874–853 BC	Jehoshaphat	873–848 BC
Ahaziah	853–852 BC		
Jehoram/Joram	852–841 BC	Jehoram	848–841 BC

1:18 the events of the days of the kings of Israel The author of 1–2 Kings may have drawn from this source, which apparently is different from the biblical books of 1–2 Chronicles (given that the Chronicler refers to it, as well; see note on 1 Chr 9:1). The mention of this separate volume suggests that the biblical book of Kings was not intended to be merely a record of events; such information could be found elsewhere.

2:1–14 The narrative shifts to Elijah’s mysterious ascent into heaven on God’s fiery chariot, which marks the end of the prophet’s career (compare Gen 5:24). This narrative marks the beginning of Elisha’s career as the head of the prophets of Yahweh (2 Kgs 2:15–16; compare 1 Kgs 19:19–21).

2:1 the storm The Hebrew word used here, *se’arah*, is associated with both the appearance of God (a theophany) and divine judgment—here it is a testament of God’s presence (Job 38:1; 40:6; Jer 23:19; Zech 9:14).

Theophany in the Old Testament

Elijah and Elisha Elisha was a young farmer living with his parents when he was called to be Elijah’s successor (1 Kgs 19:19–21).

2:2 As Yahweh lives This signifies the swearing of an oath.

2:3 the sons of the prophets A guild or brotherhood of prophets mentioned in 1 Kgs 20:35 but more common in the Elisha stories (2 Kgs 4:1; 5:22; 6:1). Such guilds were stationed in cities throughout the land of Israel, including Bethel and Jericho (vv. 5, 15).

from you This phrase expresses Elijah and Elisha’s relationship in terms of master and servant—Elisha’s apprenticeship is about to end.

2:8 It divided Elisha’s repetition of this action demonstrates his ability to take Elijah’s place (see v. 14). This account parallels Joshua’s parting of the Jordan, which likewise demonstrated God’s presence with Joshua shortly after he succeeded Moses (Josh 3:7–8, 15–17; Exod 14).

Miracles of the Prophets Table

2:9 a double portion The Hebrew phrase used here, *pi shenayim* (literally rendered “according to two shares”), echoes the legal terminology of Deut 21:17, according to which the firstborn was to receive a double share (*pi shenayim*) of the inheritance. Elisha desires for his spiritual inheritance to be like that of a firstborn son—double in share in comparison to Elijah’s other spiritual children, such as other prophets (compare John 14:12–14).

of your spirit As with Moses, the spirit of Elijah is transferrable to others (Num 11:16–17, 24–26). The office of head prophet is transferred from Elijah to Elisha—just as the office of commander of Israel is transferred from Moses to Joshua. This includes the transferring of the Spirit of Yahweh, which was at work in Elijah, to Elisha. Yahweh was the one who originally made this decision (1 Kgs 19:16).

2:11 a fiery chariot with horses of fire Fire in the OT is associated with God’s presence (compare 2 Kgs 1:10, 12). The chariots and horses belong to Yahweh (Hab 3:8).

the storm See 2 Kings 2:1 and note.

Paul and the “Third Heaven”

2:12 My father In the OT, groups sometimes applied the Hebrew word used here, *av*, denoting “father,” to their leaders (1 Sam 10:12; 2 Kgs 6:21; 13:14). Elisha’s use of *av* may suggest Elijah was head of the prophets of Yahweh, or it may simply reflect Elisha’s close relationship with Elijah (compare 1 Kgs 20:34; 2 Kgs 2:3; 4:1; 5:22; 6:1).

tore them in two pieces A gesture of grief.

2:14 Elijah’s cloak This seems to be the same cloak Elijah draped on Elisha in 1 Kgs 19:19 to signify his prophetic calling.

and struck the water Some Greek and Latin manuscripts, seeking to explain Elisha’s subsequent questions, add “and it [the waters] did not part.”

it divided See 2 Kings 2:8 and note.

2:15–25 Elisha’s actions in this string of narratives demonstrate that he has the spirit of Elijah (v. 15). While Elisha’s healing of the waters of Jericho (vv. 19–22) attests to the power of the prophetic word to bring life, his cursing of the youths at Bethel (vv. 23–25) attests to the power of the prophetic word to bring death.

2:15 the sons of the prophets See v. 3 and note.

The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha See note on v. 9.

2:16 fifty able men This phrase typically appears in reference to military forces. Here, it may simply indicate that they are able to traverse long distances quickly or refer to their prophetic abilities.

the spirit of Yahweh This phrase can also be translated “Yahweh’s wind,” since the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruach*, also denotes wind (compare 1 Kgs 19:11; John 3:5–8).

2:20 a new bowl The Hebrew term here, rendered as “jar” or “flask,” indicates a container distinct from a dish for eating or cooking (see Prov 19:24; 2 Chr 35:13).

2:21 I hereby purify these waters Draws a parallel between Elisha and Moses, who made bitter water sweet by throwing a log into the waters of Marah (Exod 15:23–25).

2:22 until this very day A formula regularly used in etiologies—stories concerned with origins (e.g., 2 Kgs 8:22; 10:27; 16:6; 17:34).

2:23 to Bethel This city was the site of one of Jeroboam’s golden calves and his altar that was torn apart (1 Kgs 12:29, 13) and a location Elisha had visited earlier with Elijah (2 Kgs 2:2–3).

young boys There is no indication in the Hebrew text of the age of the boys; they may have been adolescents.

mocked at him Since Elisha acts so harshly and is at a location where idolatrous worship took place (at least at one point), it’s likely that he was condemned for his presence as a prophet.

Go up The Hebrew text here uses the word *alah*, which (ironically) is the same word used for Elijah's ascent to heaven (v. 1).

baldhead Elisha's baldness was most likely natural and not associated with his prophetic office. Uncut hair was the accepted norm among ascetics (those who abstained from pleasure or comfort), as reflected in the Nazirite laws (Num 6:5; Judg 13:5); moreover, the law prohibited cutting hair for ritual purposes (Lev 19:27; 21:5; Deut 14:1). The text's repetition of the same phrase suggests incessant mocking of Elisha's appearance and spiritual status.

2:24 two bears The image of a female bear robbed of her cubs is used several times in the OT to describe an angry or destructive force (2 Sam 17:8; Prov 17:12; Hos 13:8).

2:25 Mount Carmel A peak within the mountain range that extends to the Mediterranean coast at the modern city of Haifa. Mount Carmel was the site of Elijah's confrontation with Ahab and contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18).⁵

Commentary

1:1-9:37 The first major section of 2 Kings traces the continuing spiritual and moral degeneracy of Israel in the era of the third dynasty of the northern kingdom, despite divine warnings of judgment through the prophet Elisha. Contemporary events in the southern kingdom during the reigns of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah interplay in the narrative.

1:1 Moab rebelled: This chronological notice likely relates to the rebellion of Mesha, the well-known king of Moab. Its placement here may serve merely as an indicator of the problems that would soon fall on Israel.

1:2 Ahaziah: The account of his brief, wicked reign begins in 1 Kin. 22:51. The division of the Book of Kings into two parts was for the convenience of the translators, as is indicated by the fact that Ahaziah's reign carries over from one book to the other without a break. **lattice of his upper room:** Houses in ancient Israel usually had one story. Palaces and grander houses would have had a second level. The upper stories commonly had balconies enclosed with latticework, allowing for the flow of air while maintaining protection from the sun and a certain privacy. Such latticework could easily be broken. **Baal-Zebub:** While the name "Zebub" is known in the Canaanite texts from Ugarit, here it may reflect a deliberate corruption of an original "zebul" (prince). If so, Hebrew scribes have transformed "Baal-Zebul" (Baal is prince) into "Baal-Zebub" (lord of flies). The scribes also wrote "Baal-Zebel" (lord of dung) at times. This deliberate change of the names of persons or gods associated with Baal worship shows the tremendous contempt with which these ideas were held by the Israelite scribes. See also the deliberate change in the names "Jezebel" (1 Kin. 16:31) and "Rimmon" (2 Kin. 5:18). The name Baal-Zebub would later be applied to Satan (Matt. 10:25; 12:24).

1:3 the angel of the LORD: At times this phrase is used as a way of referring to God. But often, and possibly here, this phrase speaks of one who is the Lord's messenger, but who is somehow distinguished from Him. The dramatic story of **Elijah** begins in 1 Kin. 17:1. **no God in Israel:** The contempt of the Lord for the errant behavior of the king is palpable in these words. **king of Samaria:** A king was identified by his country or by his capital city (1 Kin. 21:1; 2 Chr. 24:23; Jon. 3:6). This is just another title for the king of Israel. **god of Ekron:** Ahaziah followed the Baal

⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Ki). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

worship of his father. The cult of Baal was strongly identified with Ekron, a city well known for its practice of divination (1 Sam. 6:2; Is. 2:6). Ahaziah sent his messenger to Ekron not only because the city was nearby but probably because he hoped to keep the nature and extent of his injury secret. In ancient times, a king who was seriously injured or ill would be vulnerable to opportunistic attempts on his life and throne. Thus in his own view, and likely through the counsel of his advisors, Ahaziah did the “smart thing.” It was not, however, the right thing. Elijah reminded the royal messenger that Israel’s God had not abdicated His position and was available for true consultation.

1:4 The determination of God was that the king would die for his sins. The king had sought a divine message from a foreign god, but received the Lord’s word nonetheless.

1:5, 6 The **messengers** of the king were prevented by Elijah from completing their errand. God did not want any sham message coming and encouraging the wicked king. He had already received the word of the living God (v. 4).

1:7, 8 Although *hairy* may refer to Elijah’s garments, the usual translation **hairy man** is supported by the ancient versions. Ahaziah knew the man was his opponent, **Elijah the Tishbite** (1 Kin. 17:1).

Mentoring in the Old Testament

The relationship between Elijah and Elisha resembles what we today would call mentoring a prospective leader. Eventually, when Elisha literally took up the mantle of Elijah (2 Kin. 2:13), he was taking over Elijah’s role as the main prophet of Israel, a role for which Elijah had helped to groom him (1 Kin. 19:16).

Mentoring involves a voluntary investment in others for their growth, development, and success. It is rooted in faith in the value of the other person. The goal is the gain of the one being mentored, whether or not the mentor benefits. Thus mentoring often requires loving sacrifice.

1:9, 10 fire ... from heaven: Heavenly fire could signal divine judgment (Gen. 19:24). Elijah had already called down such fire in his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kin. 18:36–38). This fire was likely lightning. Baal was not the god of the storm he was reputed to be. The God of Israel was—and is—the Lord of creation.

1:11–13 Fifty men were a military unit attested elsewhere in the literature of the ancient Middle East. Each **captain of fifty** approached Elijah with a growing fear of the power of God associated with this great prophet.

1:14–17 So Ahaziah died: The prophetic word was fulfilled as announced. **no son:** This meant that the dynasty had ended. A king named **Jehoram** thus ruled in both kingdoms.

1:18 the rest of the acts: This follows the usual pattern for recording the obituaries of the kings of the northern kingdom.

2:1–4 Gilgal ... Bethel ... and Jericho were probably centers of prophetic activity that looked to Elijah for leadership. Gilgal and Bethel would become centers of pagan idolatry in the following century (Hos. 4:15; 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5)—places where a true worship of God degenerated into centers of false teaching and apostasy.

2:1 about to take up Elijah into heaven: The story that follows is so extraordinary that the narrator introduces its subject early.

2:2-6 Stay here: The tripling of these incidents is similar to the tripling of the incidents of ch. 1 (the three bands of fifty soldiers who came to seize Elijah). **As the LORD lives:** Elisha made a solemn promise three times in these same verses; he determined that he would remain by his master Elijah no matter what might occur.

2:3-7 take away: The same Hebrew verb is used for Enoch's entrance to heaven (Gen. 5:24). The work that God was about to do had been divinely revealed to many of God's servants (vv. 3, 5). This widespread knowledge of God's purpose would protect against later denials by cynical persons that the event had ever taken place. **keep silent:** It is not clear what prompted Elisha's harsh words here (and in v. 5).

2:8 The water was the Jordan River (vv. 7, 13), somewhere near Jericho. Elijah was like Moses in that his life and ministry show many parallels to that of Israel's greatest prophet. As Moses had divided the waters of the Red Sea in the final act of the redemption of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 14), so now Elijah replicated this miracle by dividing the waters of the Jordan. The difference is that Elijah did not use the power of God as a great redeeming miracle as Moses had done, but as an almost casual demonstration of God's wonders as he was walking on his way.

2:9 double portion: Although the narrative reports twice as many miracles for Elisha as Elijah, that was not the point of Elisha's request. His real request was that he would be Elijah's spiritual successor (Deut. 21:17). It was not a double portion of Elijah's goods that Elisha wanted but a double portion of his *spirit*. In material things, the principal heir received a double portion of his father's goods. Elisha wanted the principle of primary inheritance to apply to spiritual things. Nearby were all sorts of prophets. All of them would be his heirs. Any one of them might become the leading successor of Elijah. We may assume from the life he lived that Elisha's request was not due to pride. He simply wanted to be the man of God who would follow Elijah's model. Far from being a selfish request, Elisha's petition reflects his humble acknowledgment that if Elijah's ministry were to continue through him, it would take specially God-given spiritual power.

2:10 if you see me: We have no answer as to why this was important. Perhaps it spoke of persistence (vv. 2, 4, 6).

2:11 In one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible, heaven opened, a fiery chariot with fiery horses appeared, a whirlwind blew, and the prophet of God vanished alive into heaven. The **fire** associated with the **chariot** and the horses indicate the presence of God, much as the fiery angels do that Isaiah saw stationed around the throne of God (Is. 6:2).

2:12 The term **my father** underscores Elijah's relationship to Elisha as his spiritual mentor as well as the greatness of Elijah's reputation. The whole phrase is repeated at Elisha's passing (13:14). While these words were a tribute to Elijah on this great occasion, Elisha's accompanying actions indicated his personal sorrow at the loss of his spiritual master and friend.

2:13 took up the mantle: Elijah had once laid this mantle on Elisha as a symbolic action (1 Kin. 19:19); now Elisha took up the prophetic status and ministry that the mantle symbolized.

2:14 The **mantle** was only a symbol, but in the hands of Elijah it had been an instrument for the power of the living God. The mantle had been for Elijah what the rod had been for Moses and Aaron (Ex. 4:1-9; 7:9). It became the symbol of God's power in the hands of Elisha.

2:15 the spirit of Elijah: The prophets witnessed both the miracle of Elijah (v. 8) and the similar miracle of Elisha. In this way there would be common agreement that Elisha was the successor of Elijah. They **bowed**, not in worship, but in respect and submission to the will of God.

“youths”

(Heb. *na'ar*) (2 Kin. 2:23; Gen. 22:5; 1 Kin. 20:19) Strong's #5288: The noun *na'ar* always refers to males but can include different ages. It can refer to anyone from an infant (Ex. 2:6) to a young boy (Gen. 22:5) to soldiers (1 Kin. 20:17–20). It sometimes denotes a household servant (1 Sam. 9:3) or a royal official (19:6). The word can have the nuance of “rebellion,” implying that the 42 youths killed by bears should be understood as “ruffians” or “delinquents,” rather than young children.

2:16 fifty strong men: Groups of fifty men were often called upon to perform an arduous task (1:9–15). The men decided they needed a search party. Even though they had received a revelation from God that Elijah would be taken to heaven (v. 3), still they checked things out.

2:17, 18 he was ashamed: Although these words may indicate Elisha's sense of shame on behalf of his disciples for their disbelief, the use of the phrase elsewhere indicates that it means Elisha was worn out, no longer willing to resist (8:11; Judg. 3:25). He came to the point where he gave in to their request.

2:19–22 Elisha's first miracle authenticated his calling as the principal successor to Elijah (v. 14). His second miracle, the cleansing of the waters of Jericho, was purposeful and ameliorative. It also demonstrated the power of God with respect to water, so necessary for life (1 Kin. 17:1).

2:20 Elisha performed a purification ceremony (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19). The **salt** taken from a new bowl and cast into the water symbolized the cleansing of the water for new use.

2:21, 22 The miracle was done in the name of God; Elisha was only His instrument. **to this day:** That is, at the day of the writing of the account.

2:23–25 Elisha's third miracle was punitive and judgmental. Prophets were instruments both of God's grace and His wrath.

2:23, 24 Go up, you baldhead: While the severity of the sentence has been questioned, the words of the youths indicated their disbelief of Elijah's “going up” into heaven (v. 11) and their disrespect for God's prophet. God did not tolerate blasphemy against Himself by the demeaning of Elijah's departure, or the abuse of His prophet, whom He had called for an important task at a critical period in Israel's history.

2:25 Elisha made his home on **Mount Carmel** (4:25), as well as in **Samaria** (5:3).⁶

Lesson 7—Passing on the Glory

2 Kings 2:1–8:15 (852–841 B.C.)

Can there be a more conservative sport than baseball? When Lou Gehrig broke in with the Yankees in 1925, fans didn't like him because his success was a threat to Babe Ruth's status as the best in the game. In 1936 Joe DiMaggio became a threat to Gehrig. In 1951 Mickey Mantle was an unwelcome intruder in DiMaggio's last season.

⁶ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (pp. 462–464). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

In 1961 fans treated Roger Maris with thinly-veiled or open hostility as he hit sixty-one home runs to break Babe Ruth's record. They wanted to see the record broken, but they wanted Mickey Mantle to do it. He wore the hero's mantle—and had the name to prove it.

Long before he passed from the scene, Elijah had appointed Elisha his successor at the Lord's direction (1 Kin. 19:16, 19–21). Then Elijah mentored Elisha to assume the role of divine spokesman to the apostate kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. The Lord had no intention of leaving Israel without a strong witness to the truth; He loved them with an everlasting love. But would they accept Elisha with the same respect, fear, and (at times) hatred they showed Elijah?

IN THE POWER AND SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

The first thing the Lord did to ensure that Elisha would be accepted as His spokesman was arrange a dramatic transfer of authority witnessed by many people who would spread the word near and far. In fact, every time someone speaks of the mantle of office passing from one person to another, they are alluding to 2 Kings 2. Every time someone sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," they are recalling Elijah's exit from and Elisha's entrance onto the stage of Old Testament history.

What role did each of these play in the unfolding drama of Elijah's departure from this life? (2 Kin. 2:1–7)

- Elijah
- Elisha
- The sons of the prophets

Circle the letter of what seems the most likely explanation of Elijah's repeated requests that Elisha let him go on alone. Explain your choice.

- a. Elijah was testing Elisha's commitment to being a prophet.
- b. Elijah didn't want to turn his departure into a self-promoting spectacle.
- c. Elijah didn't know that God wanted Elisha to witness his ascension. Only Elisha knew that.
- d. Elijah wanted to be alone with the Lord.

Why do you think Elijah wanted to visit each group of prophets-in-training before his departure? (2 Kin. 2:3, 5, 7)

Why do you think the Lord had Elijah miraculously strike the Jordan River with his robe and cross over? (2 Kin. 2:8)

Why do you think the Lord, through Elijah, laid down a condition Elisha had to meet before he would be granted a double portion of the old prophet's spirit? (2 Kin. 2:9, 10)

BEHIND THE SCENES

The request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit was based on the custom that the firstborn son inherited a double share of his father's estate, while other sons received a single share each (Deut. 21:17). He was asking for empowerment to carry on the awesome task of speaking for the Lord in pressure-packed situations. The Hebrew word for **spirit** can refer to the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, an evil spirit, a prophetic gift, or even the wind. Even if it here refers to the spirit of

prophecy that energized the ministry of Elijah, it ultimately requires the presence of the Holy Spirit as the author of Elijah's prophetic gift and ministry power.

Describe Elijah's ascension into heaven and Elisha's reaction to it. (2 Kin. 2:11, 12)

What was the significance of Elisha crossing the Jordan as Elijah had? How important was the presence of the same witnesses at both events? (2 Kin. 2:14, 15; see v. 7)

Why didn't Elisha want the sons of the prophets looking for Elijah's body, and why did he give in to their request to search? (2 Kin. 2:16–18)

What did Elisha demonstrate about his power as a prophet when he purified the water of Jericho? (2 Kin. 2:19–22)

At Bethel, a center of apostate Israelite calf worship (1 Kin. 12:28, 29), a sizable gang of young toughs mocked Elisha and dared him to go up into heaven as Elijah had. Why do you think the Lord moved the prophet to punish them so severely? (2 Kin. 2:23, 24)

Why do you suppose the Lord directed Elisha to visit Mount Carmel before making his first solo appearance in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel? (2 Kin. 2:25; see 1 Kin. 17)

What was the good news and the bad news about the spiritual condition of Israel's King Jehoram, brother to King Ahaziah and son to King Ahab? (2 Kin. 3:1–3)

How did King Jehoram of Israel become allied with Jehoshaphat of Judah in a war against Moab? (2 Kin. 3:4–7)

Judah had defeated Edom in an earlier war and placed a puppet on the Edomite throne (2 Chr. 20; 1 Kin. 22:47). How did Judah's control of Edom factor into King Jehoram's battle plan against Moab? (2 Kin. 3:8–10)

Elisha the prophet seems to have travelled with the Israelite army from Samaria into the wilderness of Edom. What was his role in the battle of the kings of Israel and Judah against Moab? (2 Kin. 3:11–15)

How did the Lord provide for the armies of Israel and Judah to find water and defeat the Moabites? (2 Kin. 3:16–25)

What desperate measures did the king of Moab take that eventually disgusted the armies of Israel and Judah so much that they withdrew? (2 Kin. 3:26, 27)

FAITH ALIVE

What are the clearest evidences that a leader lives and serves in the Spirit and power of the Lord?

How have you seen the Lord confirm to His people that a new leader was one whom He wanted to shepherd them⁷

⁷ Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1998). *Receiving or Refusing God's Glory: A study of 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.