

Like Father, Like Son

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Date: 11 February 2024

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[0 : 00] But now let's turn to our Bible reading for this morning. We're returning to the book of Kings with Phil Copeland, one of our ministers preaching to us once again.

And we're going to be reading this morning from 1 Kings chapter 22, verse 41, through to 2 Kings 1, verse 18.

And so as we move from 1 Kings to 2 Kings, it's just over the page. And really, it is just one book. I'm sure Phil will say something about that.

So the very end of 1 Kings, beginning at verse 41. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel.

Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 25 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azuba, the daughter of Shilhai.

[1 : 07] He walked in all the way of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat and his might that he shewed and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah?

And from the land he exterminated the remnants of the male cult prostitutes who remained in the days of his father Asa. There was no king in Edom. A deputy was king.

Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ufer for gold. But they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-Geber. Then Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, said to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with your servants in the ships.

But Jehoshaphat was not willing. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, his father. And Jehoram, his son, reigned in his place.

[2 : 23] Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat. The king of Judah. And he reigned two years over Israel.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

He served Baal, worshipped him, and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done. After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria and lay sick. So he sent messengers telling them, go inquire of Baalzebub, the God of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.

But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 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're going to inquire of Baalzebub, the God of Ekron?

[3 : 37] 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 went.

The messengers returned to the king and he said to them, why have you returned? They said to him, there came a man to meet us and said to us, go back 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're sending to inquire of Baalzebub, the God of Ekron? Therefore, you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.

He said to them, what kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things? They answered him, he wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather about his waist.

And he said, it is Elijah the Tishbite. Then the king sent to him a captain of 50 men with his 50. He went up to Elijah, he was sitting on the top of a hill and said to him, oh man of God, the king says, come down.

[4 : 48] But Elijah answered the captain of 50. If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.

Again, the king sent him to another, sent him to him another captain of 50 men with his 50. And he answered and said to him, oh man of God, this is the king's order, come down quickly.

But Elijah answered them, if I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50. Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.

Again, the king sent the captain of a captain of a third 50 with his 50. And the third captain of 50 went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and treated him.

Oh man of God, please let my life and the life of these 50 servants of yours be precious in your sight. Behold, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of 50 men with their 50s.

[5 : 57] But now let my life be precious in your sight. Then the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, go down with him.

Do not be afraid of him. So he arose and went down with him to the king and said to him, thus says the Lord, because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub, 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.

So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken. Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son.

Now the rest of the act of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel? Well, amen.

[7 : 01] This is God's word. And we'll return to it shortly. Well, please do have your Bibles open to the passage you read in 1 Kings and 2 Kings.

This morning we're going to meet two kings who share one thing in common.

Oh, ringing. They share one thing in common. They are just like their fathers. And friends, that actually means that these two kings are really very, very different.

One king will show us the way of life this morning. And the other is yet another example in this book of what it looks like to go the way of death.

We'll look at them shortly. But before that, let me say what Josh mentioned earlier. You'll have noticed this morning that we've come to the end of 1 Kings. And we are not stopping.

[8 : 22] We are firing straight into 2 Kings. Because these aren't two separate books but one. If you travel back in history to around 200 BC, you will see that the book of Kings was split up into these two volumes.

Because it wasn't practical to fit on one scroll. But really, these two books, they are one continuous king's narrative. And very quickly, because it's been a while since I've done this, let me just remind you of the big picture of this one book.

It unfolds, if you like, in three sections. Section number one happens from 1 Kings 1 to 11. Now, the focus is on the reign of King Solomon. And you'll remember that when we looked at these chapters, we called them a glimpse of glory.

For that is what you saw in Solomon's kingdom. The golden years of Israel. When the United Nations really reached its pinnacle of its existence and maturity.

But friends, it was just a glimpse because it didn't last long. Solomon's many pagan wives turned his heart away to love their many pagan gods. And it was disastrous.

[9 : 40] And that takes us into the next big section of the book, which runs from 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17. Which is the section that I've called the dismal kings in the divided kingdom.

You see, as a result of Solomon's sin, the people of God were ripped in two. In the north, you have these ten tribes called the Kingdom of Israel.

And in the south, you had the remaining tribes in the Kingdom of Judah. And tragically, as we've seen throughout this whole section, you see again and again and again, the kings of Israel are so evil and idolatrous, so rebellious, that they lead the people away from the Lord.

And by the time you reach 2 Kings 17, the Lord's patience runs out. And Israel ends up in exile in Assyria. And what about the southern kingdom of Judah?

Well, as we've been hearing from Ezekiel, Judah doesn't learn from their northern neighbors. And Judah goes the same way as Israel. And that is what the last section of the book from 2 Kings 18 to 25 is all about.

[10:51] It describes the dire demise of Judah. They too end up in exile in Babylon. But friends, and let's be clear about this.

All this unfolding history, none of it happens by chance. From the glory days to the grim days of God's people, the Lord is the one who is ruling at all times, even in the bleakest moments. He is working out all things according to the purpose of His will. And He does that through His inescapable and all-powerful Word. And so that's why the main challenge of this book, all the way through, from beginning to end, for kings and for people alike, is to surrender to the Lord's all-powerful Word.

To respond to it with real faith. To take it seriously. That means obeying it. Doing what it says. Staking your whole life upon it.

Your welfare upon it. Because, friends, that is the way of life. That is the way to everlasting security. To reject the Lord's Word. To pip yourself against that Word.

[12:04] It is pure folly. And that is what we will see this morning. So with that in mind, let's look at each of these two kings mentioned here. Beginning with Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah.

The king in the southern kingdom. Let's look at his reign under two points. Firstly, we see he ruled rightly. He ruled rightly.

Please look at verse 41. So Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he began to reign.

And he reigned 25 years in Jerusalem. Now the last time the spotlight was on Judah, was way back, way, way back in chapter 15.

And since then, the focus of the book has been upon this intensifying evil in the north in Israel under Ahab's rule. And as you read on into 2 Kings, the author will continue to focus back on the north in Israel.

[13:09] But here in these verses, we are given just a brief update of what's been going on in the south. And friends, whilst it's not perfect, because it's not perfect, it is wonderfully different to what's been going on in the north.

For in Jehoshaphat, we see a king who, for the most part, ruled rightly. Please look at verse 43. In other words, here is a king so different from Ahab.

Here is a king who walked by the obedience of faith. He showed loyalty to God, worshipping the Lord alone, never turning to worship idols, never turning to the Baals.

And Jehoshaphat actually sought to lead the rest of the nation in doing the same. In verse 46, we are told that he completed this godly reform that his father Asa had begun years before, obeying God's law by getting rid of the last of these male cult prostitutes that had plagued the land for years. And friends, really, to get rid of these male cult prostitutes was to really get rid of idol worship. Because in those days, that is so often how men worshipped the pagan gods.

[14:35] You went and you hired the services of these male prostitutes, carrying out sinful and shameful acts with them. But Jehoshaphat dealt with it.

He purged this evil from the land so that the hearts of the people of Judah might not be seduced away from the Lord, but would rather worship him alone. And friends, as we look at this king of Judah, this king in the line of David, ruling to deliver his people from evil and to help them love the Lord, to help them walk in holiness, what we're seeing here is actually a beautiful preview of the greater son of David who was to come.

One who would purge his people of sin completely by dying for that sin, by dying for our sin. And through his spirit, sanctifying us in our hearts to be clean and righteous forever.

The son of David who one day will fill the earth with his peace, with his holiness, and will do away with all things wicked. So there is much in Jehoshaphat's reign to delight in.

For the most part, he ruled rightly. He was faithful. And yet, at the same time, he was also flawed, just like the rest of us. He made mistakes.

[15:53] For one thing, verse 43 says, that he failed to destroy the high places. Remember, those were the unsanctioned worship sites all over the land that people chose to sacrifice offerings to the

Lord to instead of going to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jehoshaphat never dealt with these. But there was an even bigger mistake in his reign. And that brings me to my second point about his reign. We see he made a costly compromise.

A costly compromise. Please look at verse 44. Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel.

This was a costly, costly compromise. Jehoshaphat made peace with not only Ahab, but also with Ahab's son. Ahaziah.

And he should not have done this. For both of these kings of Israel despised and defied the Lord to the very last breath of their lives. And yet, that is what the king of Judah does.

[17 : 00] It seems to be that the house of Ahab was an Achilles heel to Jehoshaphat. And this alliance, it greatly displeased the Lord, which is what is heavily implied in verse 47 to 49 with this business about the ships mentioned.

In verse 47, we're told that at that time, there was no king in Edom. And it seemed that Edom was actually, at that time, ruled by Judah. It was subservient to Jehoshaphat.

And in verse 48, with this power over Edom, Jehoshaphat launches a plan to send a fleet of his ships to set sail, leaving from this port of Edom called Ezion Geber.

And the ships were to sail to Ophir in order to bring back loads of gold. Loads of gold. Just like Solomon did back in chapter 10. But unlike Solomon in chapter 10, this mission is unsuccessful. Jehoshaphat's boats never make it out of the port. We are told that, and we don't know how, but they ended up becoming all smashed up to pieces. Now why does the author tell us about this?

[18 : 13] Why tell us about this fiasco? Well, I think he wants to show us that this enterprise didn't succeed because Ahaziah was actually mixed up in it.

From verse 49, it seems that this gold-hunting mission was actually a joint venture. Verse 49 would actually be better translated as, it was about this time, it was at this time, i.e., before the ships set sail, when Ahaziah said, let me lend you some of my troops to sail with you and your men.

It's not obvious from our English translations, but it's more obvious from the Hebrew. And that is an offer that Jehoshaphat turned down, for he had enough soldiers of his own to go on the ships to go for gold.

But it is clear that this venture was actually a joint one between Judah and Israel. And if you're not convinced, then go home and read 2 Chronicles 20, where it confirms that that is the case.

And that is why the Lord never allows these boats to make it out of the port in Edom. The Lord was really displeased with this compromise, this alliance with the house of Ahab.

[19 : 25] It was costly. Costly not just because it displeased the Lord. Costly not just because it ruined Jehoshaphat's ships. It will also prove disastrous in the future, friends.

For a few chapters later in Kings, we will see that nuptials provided the cement for this alliance with the king of Israel. In other words, we're going to see that Jehoshaphat actually allowed his own son to marry Ahab's daughter.

What a costly thing that will turn out to be. For Ahab's daughter will lead Jehoshaphat's son right away from the Lord, just like Solomon.

So much so that Jehoshaphat's son will start to rule over Judah in the south like the poisonous king Ahab, his father-in-law. He will turn out to be a wicked king of Judah.

And even worse, in 2 Kings 11, we will read that this daughter of Ahab, she will stay rooted in Judah for years until she becomes the queen mother. And one day, friends, let me tell you, she will try with all of her energy and her might to destroy the line of David.

[20 : 38] She will try and destroy the house of David. In other words, Jehoshaphat's compromise that we read of here, humanly speaking, it nearly leads to the destruction of the Lord's plan of salvation.

Now, friends, this is a real warning for us today as a believer. You can't write this off and say, oh, well, that doesn't apply to me because Jehoshaphat wasn't a believer. Jehoshaphat was a believer. He was a righteous man.

Yes. As one writer says, it is possible to possess personal faith in the Lord without exercising discerning judgment and decisions.

How often do we see folks with undoubted faith and yet that faith seems to have no carryover into their family life, their financial matters, or their understanding of moral issues.

The way of compromise is the folly of believers. The way of compromise is the folly of believers. And friends, that is a challenging word to us all.

[21 : 48] That is a challenging word, is it not, to the Christian who's just started dating someone who doesn't love the Lord, doesn't love His Word, doesn't love His church. What's the worst that could happen?

Well, a lot of damage could happen. It's a challenging word to the Christian parent who's just signed up their kids to the local rugby club. It just turns out that training happens at the same time as the church youth group runs on a Friday night.

And most of the matches take place on a Sunday. What's the worst that could happen? It's a challenging word to the Christian who's just been offered a new job with a huge pay rise, but accepting it will mean moving to a place where there isn't a decent church for miles.

What's the worst that could happen? And friends, each of us as Christians, every single one of us is Christian. There's just some examples, most of them from my last church down in England.

But friends, each of us as Christians will at some point in our lives be tempted to make similar compromises in our walk with the Lord. And 1 Kings 22 pleads with us, don't do it.

[23 : 01] Don't do it. It will come at a cost, if not now, then in the future. So friends, let's learn from Jehoshaphat. And friends, let's remember who our Heavenly Father is.

He's the Lord who loves us and wants to give us wisdom. So let's pray that He will make us a discerning people to live wisely. Well, with the rest of our time this morning, let's look at King Ahaziah.

King Ahaziah, the next king. You'll notice in verse 51 to 53, what we're given is this brief summary about His reign. And then in 2 Kings 1, we see we're back in narrative and we get an account, really, not of His reign, but of how He dies.

Of how He dies. Let's just look at the short summary section first. Please look at verse 51. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the 17th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

And he reigned two years over Israel. So here we have the son of Ahab, the evil king, whom we've been reading about recently at our 5 p.m. services.

[24 : 18] Here we have his son. And you'll remember that Ahab, Ahab the father, did more evil in the sight of the Lord than anyone before him up to history in that point.

And so back in chapter 21, the Lord came to this Ahab and said that judgment, just judgment, would one day sweep over his household. One day, Ahab's sons will be wiped out.

And friends, this Ahaziah, he would have known this. And so as we turn to the account of his reign, we pray, we hope, that he might have heard the Lord's warning and chosen to shun the way of his wicked father, humbly, humbling himself before the Lord.

But tragically, that is not what he does. In verse 52, we're told he is a chip off the old block. Like father, like son.

But more than that, he is also just like his mother. He was even worse, Jezebel, a woman who detests the Lord with a burning passion, a woman who loved nothing more than ordering the mass murder of the prophets of the Lord back in chapter 18.

[25 : 31] As if that wasn't bad enough, in verse 52, we're also told that Ahaziah followed the ways of Jeroboam. Remember, he was the very first king of Israel, the one who made the two golden bull calves to be worshipped as symbols of the Lord in Israel.

He led all the people into idolatry. In other words, friends, to sum up, Ahaziah's two-year reign is really being described as the peak of all the evil that had accumulated in Israel since its beginning. In verse 53, Ahaziah's evil and idolatry, it provoked the Lord to anger, just like his father. And friends, all the things that we see mentioned in this summary section here, all these things, they pop up again through chapter 1 of 2 Kings.

And we're going to turn to that now. 2 Kings chapter 1. And this chapter, can I just say, it is very, very like the final chapters of 1 Kings where the word of the Lord came up against Ahab.

Well, now the word of the Lord comes up against his son. Let's look at this chapter under four points. And let me just say the first two points are a bit longer, but the last two are brief indeed.

[26 : 53] The last two are brief. So let's look firstly 2 Kings chapter 1 verses 1 to 8. We see the Lord detests idolatry. The Lord detests idolatry.

So in verse 2, Ahaziah is lying on his sickbed. He is seriously injured. We don't know how it happened, but at some point he fell through a lattice screen located on an upper level of his palace. And having crashed through this lattice, he then fell a great distance. And he's now in critical condition, unsure whether or not he's going to recover or whether he's going to die.

And what is his first response to this? Does the king of Israel inquire of the Lord God of Israel? No. For Ahaziah cares nothing for the Lord.

He's rejected the Lord all the way through his life. That's what the summary says before. And he continues on on his sickbed. He continues to put his hope and trust in a Philistine God represented by a statue that was currently squatting in a Philistine temple some 45 miles away from where he lay in his sickbed.

[28 : 09] And in verse 2 he sends his messengers to go and inquire of this Philistine God. He says, Go, inquire of Beelzebub, the God of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.

Remember back then, the name Baal that you've noticed there, it could refer to actually a number of different pagan gods. And here Ahaziah is calling on his men to find out from Beelzebub, literally, the God of flies, the God of dung, the God of death, if he's going to live or if he's going to die.

And so the messengers head off as instructed. And suddenly, in verse 3, we hear about a greater king who sits on a higher throne who calls a different messenger.

Please look at verse 3. And the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up and 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 Beelzebub, the God of Ekron?

Now therefore, thus says the Lord, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die. And Elijah goes and does what's asked of him.

[29 : 36] He goes and he passes on the Lord's word to Ahaziah's men. And in verse 5, having heard this word of judgment, they decide to turn around. Elijah must have been full of authority.

And they go and they report back to the king. And in verse 6, they repeat the Lord's word verbatim, word for word perfectly to Ahaziah. Ahaziah. And in verse 7, Ahaziah looks at his men and says, Can you describe to me the man who spoke this message to you?

What was he like? What did he look like? And they answered, verse 8, He wore a garment of hair, or it could be translated, He was a hairy man with a belt of leather about his waist.

And the king replied, Elijah the Tishbite. And he says so in a poisonous tone. And we'll see what happens next in a minute.

But before then, Lord, friends, let's be clear on the implication of this scene. It's clear, the Lord detests idolatry. See friends, actually, the Lord our God, in a way, He is a very intolerant God, but in a good way.

[30 : 48] For He will not put up with idolatry in and among His covenant people. This is the reason for Him announcing this judgment on Ahaziah. It's not a flippant judgment.

It is fair and is in right response to this evil. You see, back then, the Lord was so different to the deities of the pagan nations around Israel, who didn't seem to think it was a sin if one of their devotees went off to worship other gods at the same time.

In the Bible, we meet the true and living God who commands His people I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. I have redeemed you by my grace.

Therefore, you shall have no other gods, no other gods before me. Now friends, actually, in sending Elijah to bring this word that gets to the king, actually, whilst the Lord is threatening this king, the Lord is being very, very kind to this king, this tyrant, just like his father Ahab, the Lord is giving him chance after chance to repent, to turn.

And friends, as the people of the Lord Jesus today, we also need to take idolatry very seriously indeed. As those who've been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus today, we are called to repent through all our lives of idolatry.

[32 : 19] Because the Lord Jesus still detests it to this day. The Heidelberg Catechism says idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God who is revealed only in his word.

And that is how the Bible speaks of idolatry. There is anything more important to you than God. Or anything that you trust alongside of God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God.

Anything that you look to in order to give you what only God can give. One theologian puts it like this. A false god is anything so central to your life that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.

An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources on it without a second thought.

And so friends, it can be stuff like family and children or career and money making or achievement and critical acclaim or saving face and social standing.

[33 : 36] It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances. It could be your beauty or your brains. It could be a great political or social cause or even it could be your great knowledge of the Reformed faith or success in Christian ministry.

An idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, if I didn't have that, then my life is meaningless. I'll know no value if that was cut away from me.

There are many ways to describe this kind of relationship to something but perhaps the best word to use is worship. Worship. And so a helpful question for us all to ask is this.

What am I currently looking to in life in order to find happiness, meaning an identity? These are the very things that we are in most danger of turning to and trusting in instead of the Lord.

But again, friends, remember who our Heavenly Father is in the Lord Jesus. We don't fight idolatry alone or in our own strength. Never. We do it by His mercy, by the Lord's Spirit in us, helping us.

[34 : 58] So let's pray that He will help us to turn from idols as His people today because the Lord detests idolatry. Well, how does Ahaziah respond now that he knows Elijah is the one who spoke the Lord's word to his servants?

Well, that brings me on to the second thing we see in this chapter. In verses 9 to 12, we see the Lord defends His servant. The Lord defends His servant.

So in verse 9, again, note what the king of Israel, note what Ahaziah doesn't do. He doesn't send a couple of messengers to peacefully and reverently inquire of the Lord through Elijah and how he might repent and find favor in the Lord's sight.

No. What does Ahaziah do? He sends 50 soldiers. 50 soldiers. I don't know how many people are in this room at this time, but I'm willing to hedge a bet that 50 people would probably be about these two middle sections of people.

Imagine 50 soldiers here coming against one man and they were all top soldiers and friends, this was no guard of honor.

[36 : 13] They weren't inviting the Lord's prophet for dinner with the king. This was a squad that declared hostility. Hostility, defiance, and ridicule for the Lord's prophet.

They were sent with the sole purpose of intimidation to silence Elijah, to take him prisoner and to put his life at risk. If you don't believe me, read verse 15 later on, you'll see that that was the case. Remember, Ahaziah was just like his mother who loved to shed the blood of the Lord's prophets, especially when they spoke out against their beloved Baal, their personal savior.

So picture the scene. Elijah is sitting on top of the hill and here comes this 50 soldier squad coming up to him and as they come up, the captain comes and again, his speech is full of venom.

He says, O man of God, the king says, come down. And in verse 10, Elijah answered the captain of the 50, if I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 and like that, fire comes down from heaven and utterly toasts the soldiers, burns them up, licks them up and they're gone.

[37 : 37] And in verse 11, Ahaziah hears this and he is completely unperturbed by the Lord's fire. If anything, it makes him even angrier. And what does he do? He responds by sending another squad of 50 with another captain who is just as hostile and as wicked as the first captain.

And the same thing happens. The new captain threatens Elijah and Elijah calls down fire from heaven and verse 12, it falls from heaven.

And again, the squad of soldiers are gone. Now, if you're sitting there thinking, oh, this is just dreadful. How could Elijah do such a terrible thing?

Well, let me tell you, friends, that wasn't the Lord's verdict. Was it? No, it wasn't. We're told clearly twice heaven sent fire down upon these soldiers.

Twice the Lord showed fully and publicly that he approved of Elijah's call. This, in actual fact, friends, is a just act of the Lord's judgment.

[38 : 43] So we can't possibly accuse Elijah of being wrong here as some commentators do for actually we will pip ourselves against the Lord himself.

But here's a question. Why this judgment? Why in this form? Why fire? Well, I think there's two reasons. Firstly, in sending down fire from heaven in response to Elijah's prayer, the Lord would be deliberately reminding everyone of Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18. What happened up there when the Lord showed Ahaziah's father and the whole of Israel categorically and publicly that he was the real and living God of Israel, not Baal. And the Lord is making that same crucial point again in 2 Kings chapter 1. And again, in a real sense, the Lord is actually showing a severe mercy here. He's actually giving Ahaziah and the whole nation yet another chance to see the truth and to turn to him and to worship him as God alone.

For all those who defy his word, this is the end they will face. And friends, it is terrifying. If you're sitting there thinking, this is terrifying. Friends, it is terrifying.

[40 : 03] The second reason that the Lord sends down fire is clearly to protect his servant. Elijah, the bearer of his word. Now friends, it is true.

The Lord does not always protect his servants from suffering and death. As I said earlier, there were plenty of prophets in Elijah's day who were put to the sword simply because they spoke out against the state and against its ungodliness.

Yet in this instance, Elijah is wonderfully and powerfully and publicly protected. And what is the significance of this? Well, one writer puts it like this.

He says this, does not Ahaziah represent the power of any kingdom, any throne, any ruler, any government that tries to stifle the Lord's word and silence his witnesses?

And does this little scene not testify that no king, no despot, no tyrant will ever be able to totally extinguish the witness of the word of God in this world?

[41 : 13] Now friends, we must remember that we might face hard times in the future. I spoke about that previously in this series as we've been looking through this book. We need to let passages like this give us real spine.

The Lord might not spare us if we face persecution. We might suffer, but the Lord might also deliver us. But whatever happens, we can be certain that the Lord's witness in this world will never be extinguished, never be extinguished.

And that's what we see in this passage here before us. So let it fill you with hope. Well, thirdly, and briefly, in verse 13 to 15, we see that the Lord dashes pride.

The Lord dashes pride. In verse 13, Ahaziah is still completely unperturbed by the Lord's fiery judgment. And again, he is just like his father, hard-hearted to the very end, refusing to back down in his defiance.

What he does is he sends another 50, another 50, another bunch of soldiers and a captain to Elijah. But this time, something different happens.

[42 : 26] for the next captain that goes up to Elijah, he has been deeply humbled by what he's heard of the Lord. It's remarkable. The Lord has dashed this man's pride.

That is clear from verse 13. He runs up to Elijah and he falls down on his knees before the prophet and he starts to beg for the Lord to show him and his men grace and mercy.

In verse 14, he says that he's heard of the Lord's judgment. He's heard of the Lord's fire and it's filled him with a healthy fear. It's moved him to repentance.

And so he pleads for his own life and for the life of his men. And look at how the Lord responds in verse 15. Then the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, go with him, do not be afraid of him.

So Elijah rose and went down with him to the king. In other words, the Lord shows this penitent man who's humbled himself before the Lord's word, mercy.

[43 : 33] And in this captain, the whole of Israel is given a model example of how to respond to God's wrath. Israel can see here in this man the way of life.

We'll think about what that means for us today in just a moment. moment. But let's look at the last scene of the chapter. In verse 16 to 18, we see that the Lord delivers on his threats.

So under the Lord's protection and in the custody of this penitent captain, Elijah comes to Ahaziah and he comes to this king who's been so defiant.

And in the end, he's as hard as ever on his deathbed. It makes you really challenge, it makes you really think, those who say, well, I'll think about turning to the Lord Jesus later in my life.

I'll think about turning to the Lord Jesus when I die. Well, Ahaziah says, don't do that because on his deathbed he is as hard as ever against the Lord. And Elijah comes up to him and what does he do?

[44 : 40] He gives him no new message. Please look at verse 16. Elijah says, thus says the Lord, because you have sent messengers to inquire of Beelzebub, 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.

Elijah repeats exactly what he said at the beginning of the chapter. And so verse 17, Ahaziah dies. he ends exactly in the same way as his father's life ended, according to the word of the Lord, which the Lord had spoken. The Lord promised he would die, and because he refused to repent, the Lord delivered on his threat.

Now friends, as I close, let me say that yet again, the book of Kings holds out to us all the way of death and destruction, but also the way of life.

[45 : 47] In Ahaziah, we see yet another stark warning from the Lord of the folly of trusting in things that are less than the Lord to save. The folly of rejecting his word, of rejecting his grace.

You can't live your life that way, you know. You can leave this building today, or whatever building you're in, as hard against the Lord as you've ever been before, but in the end, if you live your life that way, you will face the terrors and the horrors of the Lord's wrath.

But friends, remember there is hope. There is hope. For those who respond to the Lord like the humbled captain, those who trust in the Lord and tremble before him and seek his grace and mercy, friends, they will be saved.

They will be saved. And so, friends, this morning, whether we are someone who's been professing faith for years or whether we're someone who's never professed faith before, let's turn to the Lord and ask him to have mercy upon us and ask him to help us to trust in his word without compromise and to persevere to the very end.

Let's do that now. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Let's pray. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, our God.

[47 : 27] Help us to walk closely with you in humble and penitent faith. help us to tear down any idols that may be seated upon the throne of our hearts and worship you alone through your precious son, the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.