

2 KINGS 1-3 ELISHA SUCCEEDS ELIJAH



We now begin the study of a new book--2 Kings, which in reality is a *continuation* of 1 Kings. In the original Hebrew Old Testament, 1 and 2 Kings are only one book. It begins with a new king of Israel, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, who basically followed his father's evil ways and only got to rule for two years.

Expositor's Commentary puts it succinctly: "Ahab's son Ahaziah (853-852 B.C.) perpetuated his father's wickedness incurring God's judicial anger (1 Kings 22:51-53). The divine judgment took numerous forms: (1) *politically*, Moab found in the death of Ahab occasion to rebel against Israel (v. 1); (2) *economically*, God thwarted Ahaziah's attempted commercial enterprise with Jehoshaphat; (3) *personally*, the circumstances of Ahaziah's life were allowed to proceed in such a way that Israel's new king suffered a serious fall through the latticework of the upper chamber to the courtyard below (v. 2).

"Ahaziah was aware of the seriousness of his physical condition. In such circumstances a man's basic spiritual temperament will often surface. Immersed in the Baalism of his father, Ahaziah naturally sent messengers to inquire of the oracle at Ekron whether he would recover from his injuries (v. 2). Scarcely had they begun their mission when suddenly an austere-appearing man, dressed in a rough animal hide garment girded at the waist with a leather belt, interrupted them. Before they could gather their composure, this man sternly announced the answer to their message, together with a denunciation of the whole mission. The king had erred in seeking information from the false god of the Philistines; and he was wrong in hoping that he might recover, for surely he would die in his wickedness."

The messengers returned to Ahaziah and described the encounter with this prophet. Ahaziah identified him as the prophet Elijah and ordered a captain with his fifty men to go fetch him.

When they found Elijah sitting on top of a hill. They ordered him to come down. Elijah then said, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men. And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Then he [the king] sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men: And he...said to him, 'Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!' So Elijah answered...'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and

consume you and your men.' And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Again, he sent a third captain of fifty men. And the third captain went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him, 'Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties with their fifties. But let my life now be precious in your sight.' And the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.' So he arose and went down to the king" (1:9-15).

Notice this was the *second* time Elijah had fire come down from heaven. The first was when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice in front of the people and the prophets of Baal. Now it was to destroy the soldiers that came against Elijah—and it happened twice! This is a reason that the two witnesses in the end-time will have miraculous powers such as Elijah and will be "clothed with sackcloth [somewhat similar to Elijah's rough clothing]. These are the two olive trees [symbolic of being filled with oil, or God's Holy Spirit, see Zechariah 4:11-14] and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth [they have the light of truth for the world]. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies [as Elijah ordered the fire to come down and consume the soldiers]. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner [as it happened to those that wanted to kill Elijah]. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy [as again, Elijah did in the days of Ahab]; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire [as Moses did in Egypt]" (Revelation 11:3-6).

Once he came before the king he said: "Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is not 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 Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken" (1:16-17). He ruled from around 853 to 852 B.C.

Why did Ahaziah consult pagans at Ekron? *The JFB Commentary* mentions, "Anxious to learn

whether he should recover from the effects of this severe fall, he sent to consult *Baalzebub*, that is, the god of flies, who was considered the *patron deity of medicine*. A temple to that idol was erected at Ekron, which was resorted to far and wide, though it afterwards led to the destruction of the place (Zec 9:5; Amos 1:8; Zep 2:4)."

Consulting with a pagan shrine and a false god was a major insult to God, and that was why Ahaziah paid for it with his life. There were doctors in Israel. It was the equivalent of us going to a pagan temple with a false god to get healed. God was certainly not pleased and there would be dire consequences!

Once Ahaziah died, since he did not have any children to succeed him, *his brother Jehoram*, another one of Ahab's sons, became the next king.

At this time, with the death of Ahaziah, it was time for Elijah to turn over the reins to Elisha. It would be necessary for Elijah to be taken somewhere else so Elisha would have free rein in his position as a prophet. God decided to do this in a dramatic way.

The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal....And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan [at Jericho]. Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you? Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.' So he said, 'You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if not, it shall not be so.' Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father; the chariot of Israel and its horsemen! So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle...and struck the water and said, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that, and Elijah crossed

over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him" (2:1-15).

Now the sons of the prophets did not believe Elijah had been taken to the "third heaven" where God dwells, but had been taken somewhere close by. They finally received permission from Elisha to look, but they couldn't find him. But Elijah was still somewhere close to the territory of Israel.

Remember, "heaven" in the Scriptures can mean (1) our atmosphere where birds fly (Genesis 1:20), or (2) outer space, where the stars and planets are located (Genesis 1:14), or (3) the "third heaven," where God dwells (2 Cor. 12:2). We know Elijah was not taken to the "third heaven" because in 2 Chronicles 21:12, *around ten years later*, Elijah actually wrote a letter to Jehoram, king of Judah, the son of Jehoshaphat [not the Jehoram king of Israel]. So Elijah was still on the earth! He had been transported to another part of the earth, but was still in touch with what was going on in Israel. Also, Jesus Christ later stated that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). One of the points He was making was that scripture in one section of the Bible cannot contradict scripture in another section. In this same Gospel of John, Jesus revealed a startling fact, "*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven*, that is, *the Son of Man* who is in heaven" (John 3:13, emphasis added throughout). Clearly, Jesus Christ said He was the only one who has ascended into heaven. So He did not believe Elijah was in heaven or He would have mentioned him as an exception to His statement.

So Elisha now takes over and he did see Elijah be taken up, therefore he did receive a double portion of Elijah's miraculous power. He showed this by parting the Jordan as Elijah had done and now the men of Jericho asked a request from him.

The Bible says, "Then the men of the city said to Elisha, 'Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren.' And he said, 'Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.' So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, 'Thus says the Lord: 'I have healed the water; from it there shall be no more death of barrenness.' So the water remains healed to this day" (2:19-22).

Expositor's Commentary explains, "This chapter closes with two miracles of Elisha. These immediately established the character of his ministry; his would be a helping ministry to those in need, but one that would brook no disrespect for God and his earthly representatives. In the case of Jericho, though the city had been rebuilt (with difficulty) in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 16:34), it had remained unproductive. Apparently the water still lay under Joshua's curse (cf. Josh 6:26), so that both citizenry and land suffered greatly. Elisha's miracle fully removed the age-old judgment, thus allowing a new era to dawn on this area. Interestingly Elisha wrought the cure through means supplied by the people of Jericho so that their faith might be strengthened through submission and active participation in God's cleansing work.

"But Elisha's sweet memories of Jericho received a souring touch at Bethel [with the taunting from some juvenile delinquents]. The public insult against Elisha was aimed ultimately at the God whom he represented. Indeed Elisha's whole prophetic ministry was in jeopardy; therefore the taunt had to be dealt with decisively. The sudden arrival of the two bears who mauled forty-two youths to death would serve as both an awful sentence on unbelievers--and thus, too, on Jeroboam's cult city--and a published reminder that blasphemy against the true God and his program would be met with swift and certain consequences. With these two miracles Elisha's position as successor to Elijah as God's chief prophet to Israel was assured."

Elisha would now have to deal with Ahab's evil son, Jehoram. "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord" (3:2). God's blessings and protection would not be upon him, and Mesha, king of Moab, rebelled against his rule and refused to pay tribute (3:4).

So Jehoram formed an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah and the king of Edom against the Mesha, king of Moab. But when they reached a very dry area of the country, their water supplies ran out and they thought they would all perish. Jehoshaphat wanted a prophet of God to counsel them and it so happened that Elisha had been close by. When they sent for him, he said that the only king he respected there was Jehoshaphat and was willing to help him. So Elisha performed a great miracle and the next day they had plenty of water. Then another great miracle was performed when the enemy army saw in the distance what they thought was pools of blood, when

it was only the recently brought water. They came in thinking the kings had fought among themselves and then found they were the ones fooled. They were cut down and then their towns were destroyed. The surviving soldiers fled into the city and the invading armies then laid a siege around the capital of Moab.

When Mesha, the king of Moab saw that the situation was hopeless, he did an abominable thing. "Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall, and there was great indignation against Israel. So they departed from him and returned to their own land" (3:27).

As *Expositor's* clarifies, "The frenzied Moabite king sacrificed his firstborn son and heir to the throne so that the anger of his gods might be appeased and the city delivered. While Moab's god could never deliver the king and the city, the act had the desired effect. Sickened by the maddened spectacle of senseless human sacrifice, the allies lifted the siege and returned to their homes. As Krummacher (*Elisha*, p. 45) remarks, "The object of the campaign had been attained; the power of Moab was broken, the rebellion suppressed, and the country again placed under the scepter of the king of Israel."

The Moabite Stone, inscribed by the orders of this very king Mesha, accurately confirms the biblical account, but from the point of view of the Moabites. It mentions that Mesha overthrew the yoke of the Israelites, prayed to his god Chemosh, and was delivered. Of course, he conveniently leaves out that he had to sacrifice his own son to Moloch! But it was true that the siege was lifted and the enemy armies left the place. The Bible does verify that Mesha rebelled, Moab was invaded and that the capital city was not taken—and explains something the Moabite Stone doesn't—that it was because of the general disgust of watching in horror the human sacrifice of the king's firstborn son—something unheard of!