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## 2 Kings 1 - 2



### 2 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this continuation of the first book of Kings, the death of Ahab resulted in his son Eheziah becoming king. It is speculated that during the 50 years in which Moab served Israel, they took advantage of the power vacuum caused by Ahab's death to rebel and assert their independence by refusing to pay tribute. Despite the miracles of Elijah, it appears that some people continued to worship pagan gods, choosing sensuality, cruelty, and selfishness over holiness. Alongside an analysis of the text, the speaker includes thought-provoking comments on the relevance of faith and divine intervention in contemporary society.

## Transcript

Well, we begin this second book of Kings in this lecture, but it's really not a second book. It's just a continuation of the first book. These are not two volumes that were written as a book and its sequel.

These were really just written as one book, artificially divided into two books for practical purposes. In Hebrew, there are no vowels, and so the Hebrew characters don't take up as much space, or Hebrew words don't take up as much space. And therefore, the book of Kings was all one book, one document in the Hebrew, but when it was translated into Greek in the Septuagint version, they had to add vowels in order to have Greek words, and it made it longer.

So they broke it into two books so they could accommodate that much more black and white, that much more ink. So, in the last part of 1 Kings, we saw the death of Ahab, whose reign had been quite the focus of, what, at least seven or eight chapters previously. Not because he was so great, but because he was so evil, and because he was opposed by Elijah the prophet, who was so great that the writer gave many chapters to consideration of the ministry of Elijah.

We are not finished looking at the ministry of Elijah, but almost. We will see the end of Elijah's stay here on earth in chapter 2 of 2 Kings. He's still with us in chapter 1. As far as the kings are concerned, the death of Ahab resulted in his son Ahaziah becoming king.

He didn't last long, and therefore another son of Ahab took over because Ahaziah would die childless. And so in the north we have Ahaziah replacing his father Ahab, and then in the south we have read about the death of Jehoshaphat, a good king, the son of Azah, two good kings in a row. His son was named Jehoram, which, interestingly enough, was also the name of the second son of Ahab, who became king after the death of Ahaziah, which means that for a while both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom had kings named Jehoram.

Sometimes one of them is shortened to Joram, but it's the same name. So, I mean, that's a strange fluke that both kingdoms would have kings by the same name briefly. Now, with the death of Ahab, it says in 2 Kings 1, verse 1, Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

Now, Moab had been one of the conquered territories, apparently for some time, had paid tribute to Israel. We don't know exactly when this began. Scholars think it may have been about for 50 years or so that Moab had served Israel.

But with the death of Ahab, they took advantage of the power vacuum and rebelled and decided not to pay tribute anymore and to assert their independence from Israel. In all likelihood, they saw Ahab as a strong enough military man that they would not risk it during his lifetime. His son, perhaps, was viewed as a weakling and, therefore, they took advantage of that and rebelled at this time.

But that was only one of Ahaziah's problems. He also had an accident in which he was seriously injured. And it's in verse 2, it says, Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and was injured.

Now, I'm not sure how one falls through a lattice, but he apparently fell more than one story. And his injuries were life-threatening and he was laid up with them. And he sent messengers and said to them, Go inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.

Now, Beelzebub, you may recognize more from the New Testament term Beelzebub. In the New Testament, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub in Matthew chapter 12. And they identified Beelzebub as the prince of demons.

Now, Jesus did not dispute this. He said, Well, if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, that is, he didn't dispute that Beelzebub existed or that he was the prince of demons. He said, If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, then who do your sons cast them out by? He, of course, denied that he cast them out by Beelzebub, but he did not deny their belief in Beelzebub.

Now, this may have simply been an accommodation to make a point. And whether Jesus

really affirmed that there is a prince of the demons named Beelzebub, we don't know. But Beelzebub in the New Testament is a Greek form of Beelzebul.

Baal means Lord. Zebub means of the flies. Now, scholars are not really agreed as to whether Beelzebub was the real name of this deity or not.

Most scholars seem to believe that the deity's name was Beelzebul. There is a reference elsewhere in Scripture to such a pagan god named Beelzebul. And that means something like Lord Prince or something like that.

But many times the Jews would mock Baal and they would change names. Even some of their important people, like some of the sons of Solomon or sons of Saul, would have names that had the name Baal in them. And they would change them.

For example, Mephibael was changed to Mephibosheth. Ishbael was changed to Ishbosheth. Bosheth means shameful thing.

And Ishbael means man of Baal. But the Jews of later times didn't want to call him the man of Baal. They wanted to call him the man of a shameful thing.

So they remembered him as not Ishbael but Ishbosheth. And likewise, Mephibael, they changed to Mephibosheth. Replacing the word Baal with shameful thing, showing their contempt for Baal.

It is thought that they have done something similar here. They took the name Beelzebul, which means Lord Prince, and changed it to Beelzebub, which means Lord of the Flies. Obviously an insulting designation for him.

And if that's true, then of course, Ahaziah did not actually say go inquire Beelzebub, but he said go inquire Beelzebul. And the later writers changed it to Beelzebub in showing their contempt for this deity. Now there's another opinion held by Psalm.

And that is that the deity was in fact called Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies. And they're suggesting that he was the god of the realm of the insects, and of disease, and pestilence, and so forth. And so, some have thought that.

There's not agreement among scholars about that. I tend to think the first suggestion is more probable. But on the idea that Beelzebub was actually called the Lord of the Flies, and meaning flies, and pestilence, and sickness in general.

That he might have wanted to inquire of Beelzebub because he was sick. In any case, he was not inquiring of the right god. He didn't inquire of Yahweh.

Which is this most bizarre thing. That these kings of Israel just did not think about inquiring of Yahweh, who was their historic god, who had done so many things, whose very existence of their nation was due to him delivering them from Egypt, and giving

them the law, and them making a covenant with him. And then he had confirmed his reality even in their own time, through the miracles of Elijah, the drought, and the rain coming from Elijah's prayer, and the fire from heaven coming down.

I mean, these people, it's not as if they don't have even better reasons than we have to know that God is real. They saw miracles such as none of us have ever seen. And yet we believe in Yahweh.

I'm not saying we're better than they are, I just don't understand why they are so stupid. I don't really know why they would choose Beelzebul, or Beelzebub, instead of Yahweh. It may be because those gods of the pagans certainly allowed them to do more evil things.

They were evil gods. And those who worship evil gods elevate evil to that level of a virtue. It's like they're gods.

Yahweh is a holy god, and therefore only holiness is viewed as a virtue by those who worship him. What God is like is what virtue is. And the pagan gods often were cruel, bloodthirsty, sensuous, and that's what people were, and they liked to be.

And so perhaps they worshipped these pagan gods even though they knew about Yahweh because it was easier to affirm sensuality and cruelty and selfishness than holiness in their own lives. In any case, he's sent to the wrong god, and that got him in trouble, as well it should, in trouble with God. It says, The angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, Is it because there is no god in Israel that you are going to inquire of 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.

So Elijah departed with this message. The implication is, if you had inquired of the Lord, the outcome could have been different. But because you're inquiring of Beelzebub, God says you're going to die.

That god will not be able to help you. I could have if you'd look to me, but you didn't. And when the messengers returned to him, he said to them, Why have you come back? They actually didn't go all the way to Ekron to inquire.

It was a 40 mile trip for them from Samaria to Ekron, 40 miles on foot. That takes a couple days anyway. They had been intercepted by Elijah, given this challenge and given a message for the king.

So instead of carrying out the orders of the king, they carried out the orders of Elijah and went back to the king. He said, Why did you come back? And they said to him, A man came up to meet us and said to us, Go return to the king who sent you and say to him, Thus says Yahweh, Is it because there is no god in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to

which you have gone up, but you shall surely die. That's not a message that would be easy to give to a king if you valued your life.

But apparently they felt like they had to obey what Elijah said. They may have been more Yahweh fearing than the king was. Then the king said to them, What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these things? These words.

So they answered him, He was a hairy man and wore a leather belt around his waist. And he said, It's Elijah the Tishbite. This is his customary uniform.

He's a hairy man wearing a leather belt. Now leather belts don't seem that unusual to us. You wouldn't give that as a distinctive thing about someone.

This guy who robbed me, he was wearing a leather belt. That wouldn't help an awful lot because everybody wears leather belts. But in those days people didn't wear leather belts.

Maybe soldiers did. A leather belt would be something that they could strap their sword to. But men wore robes and togas and such that were bound at the waist, if at all, by a cloth sash of some kind like you'd have on your bathrobe.

Not a leather belt. So it was an unusual thing for a man to have a leather belt. And that's one of the features that made the king know, Oh, that's got to be Elijah wearing that leather belt.

Now why he wore a leather belt, I don't know. It may be a fashion statement or it might just be what came readily to hand. But the point is it was unusual enough that it was a distinguishing trait.

Also it says he was a hairy man, which has given many the impression that perhaps he was a Nazirite. A Nazirite would be one who had not cut his hair. And if he was like, say, Samson or Samuel, a Nazirite from birth, which is not necessary to assume, he would have extremely long hair and beard, never having ever cut it.

But even if he had only been a Nazirite for years, he'd have a lot of hair on him, face and head. If we say a man's hairy, we might be referring to, you know, a hairy chest and hairy arms and things like that, like Esau. Esau was covered with hair and he was called hairy.

But in the case of Elijah, he might have been hairy in that sense too. But it seems more likely that he was a Nazirite. John the Baptist came, we're told, in the spirit and the power of Elijah.

And among the things we're told about him are that he was a Nazirite and he wore a leather belt. John the Baptist was dressed in a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt.

So just as Elijah wore a leather belt, which was unusual, so John the Baptist did too.

He dressed like Elijah. Now, the hairy part could refer to a garment of camel's hair. John the Baptist both was a Nazirite and wore a garment of camel's hair.

But when we hear about a garment of camel's hair, we might be thinking differently than it's intended. I know growing up thinking of John the Baptist wearing a garment of camel's hair, I always thought he was wearing a camel pelt, you know, like the hide of a camel with all the hair hanging up, like a furry-looking garment. Like maybe a mink stole or a bearskin rug or something like that.

But actually camel's hair was a kind of cloth woven from camel's hair, very coarse. Just as a wool garment would be a sheep's hair, you know. A sheep's hair garment would be anything made of wool because wool is the hair of a sheep.

Camels have hair too and they would also shear camels and use their hair to weave into cloth. But it was very coarse. It was more like burlap.

It was the kind of hair, it was the kind of cloth that they make sackcloth, you know. Like a burlap bag, sackcloth. When people were repenting, they often put on sackcloth, which would be a rough, uncomfortable kind of clothing against the skin.

It was a sign of repentance. When it says that John the Baptist wore a garment of camel's hair, it doesn't say camel's skin, but camel's hair, which was basically cloth woven from a camel's hair. And therefore he was wearing something like sackcloth all the time.

His message was a message of repentance. And therefore wearing sackcloth or camel's hair, it was the poorest kind of cloth that only very poor people would wear. Because as Jesus said about John the Baptist in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus said, what did you go out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? What did you go out to see? A man in fine clothing? He says, no, those who are in fine clothing, they're in king's houses.

But what did you go out to see? You went out to see a prophet, more than a prophet. He's talking about John. He says, did you think you'd find John wearing fine clothing? No, you're looking at the wrong place.

He's out in the wilderness. People in fine clothing are not out camping in the wilderness. They are in king's houses.

They're wearing silks and comfortable clothing. He was wearing rough clothing. Now, was Elijah, did he wear camel's hair too? We don't know.

He was a hairy man. I suppose there's a remote possibility that this is a reference to his clothing, that his clothing was made of woven hair, camel's hair and all, you know, very

possibly. Since John the Baptist, in other respects, mimicked Elijah, it may be that the camel hair that John the Baptist wore was also a mimicry of what Elijah wore.

But we have no Old Testament testimony to that fact. We do know about the leather belt. We know that something about him caused him to be described as a hairy man.

That he was a Nazirite seems almost certain. Although it doesn't tell us directly elsewhere about this, but the fact that he was hairy in all likelihood is a description of his beard and the hair on his head mostly. And that means probably he was a Nazirite.

It would make sense that he would be. Other prophets were. Samuel was.

John the Baptist was. And Elijah, if any, would be a Nazirite. It seems like he would be.

So anyway, this is the description that came back. And from the description, Ahaziah immediately deduced, oh, that's got to have been Elijah who said that. Then the king sent to him a captain of 50 with his 50 men.

So he went up to him. These 50 soldiers with their captain were sent by the king to bring Elijah to him. He wanted to hear it from Elijah's own mouth.

And so this captain of 50 men went and found him. And there he was sitting on top of a hill. And the captain spoke to a man of God.

The king has said, come down. So Elijah answered and said to the captain of 50, if I'm a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men. And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50.

Then he sent to him another captain of 50 over his 50 men. And he answered and said to him, man of God, thus says the king, come down quickly. So Elijah answered and said to them, if I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50. Now, the fire of God could be pictured perhaps as, you know, just like a flamethrower from heaven, you know, just burning them up. I think many scholars would assume that this is referring to lightning because lightning striking the earth or striking anything on earth by the ancients was considered to be fire from heaven.

And so, you know, some would say, well, a lightning bolt came and struck and killed these people. In any case, there'd be nothing unmiraculous about it. I mean, lightning struck twice in the same spot and killed 50 people each time upon command from Elijah.

I mean, he can command the heavens not to rain, that he can command the heavens to rain, and he can command lightning to come down and strike where he wants it to. It may have been lightning or it might have been more as my picture of, you know, flames.

In any case, Elijah showed himself quite capable of protecting himself from arrest.

And that's apparently how he understood this. He understood this, that they were coming to arrest him. They're commanding him, come down here.

Now, the problem that they had was that they called him man of God. You see, they're saying the king commands you, man of God. Now, if I'm a man of God, isn't God my superior? What king can give such orders? What king can send to arrest me, a man of God? If you're right in calling me a man of God, well, then you deserve to die because you are accosting a man of God.

And you're only a man of this earthly king. This earthly king is giving commands to me. What do you think it means to be a man of God? I answer to God.

I'm sent from God. I have God on my side. I stand for God.

And some petty tin horn tyrant thinks that he can command a man of God? What kind of disrespect for God does that show? If I'm the man of God that you say that I am, then let God vindicate me and consume you. And it happened twice. Then it says in verse 13, Then again he sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty men.

And the third captain of fifty men went up and came up 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. This is the way to arrest a prophet. The police captain comes and bows down and says, We're your servants, public servants.

We're from the government. We're here to help. So, we're your servants.

Let our lives be precious in your sight. In other words, he's coming with a humble attitude. I recognize you're a man of God.

We want to honor God. We don't want to treat you roughly as if it's a small thing to be a man of God. But realize that we've been sent here with a request from the king that you would come.

And so, please, would you be kind enough to come? So, he comes with more humility and more respect than these others did. And so, he says, Look, fires 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.

In other words, please don't kill me. 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 with him to the king. Then he said to him, Thus says the Lord, because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. Is it



because there is no god in Israel to inquire of his word? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.

So, Elijah actually did present himself to the king, but gave him no more information than what he had sent to him earlier. But at least Ahaziah heard it from the prophet's own lips. And so Ahaziah died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.

Because he had no son, Jehoram, who is also sometimes called Joram, just removing one syllable from the middle, became king in his place. In the second year of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. So we've got a Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, ruling in Judah, and now a Jehoram, son of Ahab, ruling in the north.

So this makes the fourth king of the line of Omri. Remember, Omri was king in Israel, then Ahab was his son, and then Ahaziah was Ahab's son, and now Jehoram is another son of Ahab. Now there have been four kings of this line of Omri.

However, God has determined that he's going to wipe out this line. And he will. But that's about as long as any dynasty lasted in Israel, is four kings of one dynasty.

I believe the dynasty of Jehu also was four generations, but never went longer than that. Whereas in the south, the dynasty of David was 20 generations. They never had any other dynasty supplanted in the south.

So we've got Jehoram in the north and Jehoram in the south, sons of Ahab and of Jehoshaphat, respectively. Now the rest of the Acts of Ahaziah, which he did, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel? Well, they may well be. We will never really be able to establish that by looking at those books, but we'll just have to take this author's word for it, because it certainly must have been true.

Chapter 2. 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. Now, we have not heard much about Elisha, but apparently he's been with Elijah on these other occasions, but unmentioned. What we heard about Elisha previously was that he was plowing at his father's farm, or at his own farm, and Elijah came upon him and threw his mantle over him and called him to be his servant and to accompany him.

Now, it's interesting that Elijah had had a servant earlier, and when he fled from Jezebel, he went to Beersheba and he left his servant there. And then he went alone down to Horeb, and at Horeb God spoke to him and said, I want you to anoint Elisha to be your successor. And so he apparently never went back to pick up his servant, but he left at Beersheba.

That guy must have become a permanent resident there. And Elijah found Elisha, and apparently the servant that Elijah had before was not the one God had chosen, and

therefore Elisha became that one. And we have not heard about Elisha since then, although Elijah has been mentioned.

We now realize that as Elijah is going, we have to focus on his successor who will be his servant, Elisha. And Elijah said to Elisha as they came to Gilgal, or from Gilgal, Elijah said to Elisha, Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.

So they went down to Bethel. Now, what's interesting here is Elijah told Elisha to stay, and Elisha said, No, I'm going with you. That kind of resistance to a prophet's orders before had gotten people killed by lions in the past.

You may remember, there was an anonymous prophet of the sons of the prophets who told his companion, Strike me. And the man said, No, I'm not going to strike you. He said, Well, then a lion will kill you.

And a lion did kill him. You know, generally speaking, when a prophet tells you to do something, you better do it. In this case, one of the greatest prophets, perhaps the greatest prophet ever, told Elisha, You stay here.

And he said, No, I won't. But obviously, there must have been other dynamics in the relationships and the conversations and what was known than are recorded. We're given the most brief possible account of really what transpired.

These men walked around for days and perhaps years together conversing, and they knew each other's mind and heart, and we are only given the sketchiest details. Apparently, Elisha knew that Elijah was simply trying to give him the option of staying behind. After all, being the prophet that Elijah was, was not an easy road to take.

He had to eat food brought to him by ravens. He had to run for his life from persecution from the monarchs. If Elisha would just kind of retire himself, Elisha, then he might not be the target of persecution and so forth that he would be if he succeeded Elijah.

Now, Elijah knew that Elisha would be his successor because God had told him that at Mount Horeb. The still small voice that had come to Elijah had said, You anoint Elisha to essentially to take your place. So, Elijah knew that Elisha was his successor, and so by telling him to wait behind, Elisha apparently also knew that this was not an order.

This was permission. You know, I'm giving you the option to not be my successor. It's not an easy road.

And therefore, why don't you just stay here and save yourself a lot of headaches. And Elisha said, That's not what I'm about. I'm going to go with you.

And so they went to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out

to Elisha. And they said to him, Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from over you today? And he said, Yes, I know.

Keep silent. Now, I don't know why the keep silent part, but it's obvious that the schools of the prophets, these sons of the prophets, they were receiving revelation from God. That's what they were.

They were prophets. And what God was saying to the prophets was, This is the last day of Elijah's ministry on earth. And actually, the prophets elsewhere came out and told Elisha the same thing.

Apparently, wherever they went, the prophets had been informed by God that this was the day they were going to lose Elijah, the greatest of them. And so they said to Elisha, Do you realize that? And he said, Yahweh, I know. I'm a prophet too.

And God had also showed it to Elisha. But he says, Keep silent. Maybe he's saying, Don't try to dissuade me from going with him or whatever.

I don't know what it means by keep silent necessarily. Or maybe he's saying, That's all that God has revealed. Namely, that Elijah is going.

He hasn't revealed beyond that. And don't try to tell me anything more than that. You know, I don't know if that's what he means.

Then Elijah said to him, Elisha, stay here, please. For the Lord has sent me on to Jericho. And Elisha said, As the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.

So they came to Jericho. This was how Joshua was with Moses. He would not leave Moses.

No one else was allowed to be with Moses as much as Joshua was. But Joshua was like a personal servant to Moses. And he stuck with him wherever he went.

And then, of course, he was chosen to be his successor. That's how Elisha is with Elijah. And some of the sons, they came to Jericho.

And the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today? And he said, Yes, I know. Keep silent. Then Elijah said to him, Stay here, please.

That is in Jericho. For the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan. And Elisha said, As the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.

So the two of them went on. Elijah kept giving him a chance to change his mind. If he really wants to count the cost and change your mind and say, I don't want to be what Elijah is, then he's giving him an out.

Now, if you're a spiritually minded person, as you probably are, and that's why you're in a school like this, is because you have spiritual hunger and aspirations, then it might seem that, well, who wouldn't? Who wouldn't want to be Elijah's successor? I mean, who wouldn't want to see those kinds of miracles? Who wouldn't want to hear from God like that? Who wouldn't want to live a life like that? Now, maybe you don't think that, but I certainly do. And I always have. From my youth, I was like, Man, wouldn't it be wonderful to be Elijah? Well, it's not all wonderful, of course.

There's persecution. But even so, it still seems like the privilege of being used of God and hearing from God and having that kind of relationship that was so rare in those days for any man to have with God. What a privilege that was.

And maybe not all Christians think this way. I would think we'd all say, Man, I'd give my I.T. to be able to be in the position that Elijah was in, to be able to have the double portion of Elijah's spirit come upon him. But my assumption is everyone would think that way.

But if a person wasn't spiritually minded, they certainly wouldn't have any interest at all in that kind of a rustic, Spartan, persecuted, nomadic existence. I mean, that's always appealed to me since I was young, to tell you the truth. I kind of wanted to live that way anyway.

But the point is that not all people want to. And especially people who don't love God, what do they care about hearing from God? What do they care about speaking for God? What do they care about being the instrument of God in their generation? I have a hard time relating with those who wouldn't value that. But apparently there were not many in Israel that would like to have been Elijah or his successor.

And Elisha was one of those who would be more like what I would imagine a spiritual man would be. Of course. I'm not going to get, I'm going to stick with you like white glue.

I'm never going to let you out of my sight because I want to be with you down to the last moment, hoping that I might receive your mantle upon me. And so that's Elisha's attitude. And so the two of them went on.

Verse 7, And fifty men from the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. So there were a lot of these sons of the prophets. It may be not just the sons of the prophets from Jericho.

Maybe some of the ones from Bethel and these other places had followed along too. But there were fifty of them. They didn't go to the Jordan.

Elijah didn't really invite them to. But he invited Elisha not to. But he also apparently invited them to go with him because Elisha said, I'm going.

And Elijah didn't say, no, you're not. I'm going alone. He did allow him to go with him.

And so there were fifty other sons of the prophets who didn't go with him, but could watch from a distance to see what would happen. Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up and struck the water. So it divided this way and that.

This is the Jordan River we're talking about. So that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. Now why? If God's going to take Elijah up into the sky, why not just do it from Jericho or from this side of the river? Why cross the river and do it from the other side? Well, there may have been any number of reasons.

One thing is Elijah was from that region. That was his homeland. Maybe he was taken up from his home region.

I don't know. But in any case, what it meant was, by Elisha following him across the Jordan, it means that Elisha would have to cross the Jordan back into the promised land again. And he would do so in the same miraculous way.

Not only the miraculous way that Elijah had crossed, but that Joshua had crossed. Joshua had led the people of Israel through the Jordan as it miraculously parted for him. And Elisha is in a position very much analogous to that of Joshua.

Both of them are types of Christ. Both of them are successors of men who were, in some other ways, types of Christ. Moses and Elijah.

And so there's one thing that this accomplished. I don't know if this was its reason or its purpose, but one thing it accomplished was it put Elisha on the east of Jordan, needing to cross back to the west, and doing so in the same way that Joshua had, back to Jericho. That's where Joshua had crossed over to, just near Jericho.

And so Elisha begins his ministry after Elijah goes up by starting out pretty much the way Joshua did. Coming across the Jordan that had been dried up in order to let him through. So, Elijah first did this, and they crossed over on dry ground across the riverbed.

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? What are you after anyway? Why do you follow me like this? What was it you wanted? And Elisha said, Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me. Now, a double portion may be something to be taken somewhat literally. Some people have said that if you count them up, the miracles of Elisha were twice in number, the miracles of Elijah.

So in a sense he had a double portion, maybe in a literal sense. But many have understood this primarily to be a figure of speech. The person who received a double portion of an inheritance was the successor to the father.

If a father died and had many sons, he left a double portion to the one who was the firstborn. He received the inheritance of one who would be the successor to his father as the leader of the family. That's what the firstborn privilege was.

That's what a double portion meant in Israel. And so he may simply be saying, I'd like to be your heir. I'd like to be your successor.

I'd like to have the double portion of what you've got, of your anointing, of your spirit, of the power that's given to you. And so Elijah said, You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I'm taken up from you, it shall be so for you.

But if not, it shall not be so. Now, Elijah, you know, acts like he's not really sure whether God will grant this or not. Though at Mount Horeb, God had already told him that Elisha would be his successor.

So, I'm not sure why he spoke as he did, as if, well, this is not a sure thing. If you happen to see me go up, then that will happen. It may be not so much the question of succession as the question of a double portion.

That is perhaps an increased amount of power, such as Elijah had being given to Elisha. This is a big thing to ask. And I'm not sure if God's going to give you that, but you'll know if he happens to grant you the privilege of being watching when I'm taken up.

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, came between them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. We often say that Elijah went up in a chariot of fire.

Maybe that's how we're to understand it. There are some who understand it differently. It doesn't say Elijah went up in a chariot of fire.

There was a chariot of fire, but it doesn't say that Elijah got into it. It says he was taken up in a whirlwind, like a tornado took him up. And likewise, that's what it said at the very beginning of the chapter, chapter 2, verse 1. It came to pass when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind.

Now, it is possible that he got into the chariot, and the chariot was carried up in a whirlwind. So you could have both things happening. There are two phenomena mentioned.

There is this chariot and horses of fire, and it comes between the two men as they're walking and talking. It just comes between them and separates them. And then there's the whirlwind that takes him up.

So whether Elijah got into the chariot of fire is not stated. And some think that maybe

the chariot of fire was to test Elijah's concentration. Like, if you see me go up, then you get what you want.

Now, here's a distraction for you. Look at this chariot of fire over here. Oops, where'd Elijah go? Missed it.

That's what some people think. Some people think that maybe the chariot of fire had nothing to do with Elijah going up, but had to do with testing Elijah's resolve to keep his eyes on Elijah. Because, after all, it would be somewhat distracting.

Now, Elijah also saw chariots of fire on another occasion later on. In chapter 6, when he was surrounded in the city of Dothan by the Syrian armies, he and his servant were able to see chariots of fire surrounding the hills. These were, no doubt, angelic armies.

And now this one chariot of fire might have been sent to take up Elijah. And I think that that's what many people believe is the case. It's not stated quite in so many words.

But he was taken up into heaven. Now, heaven means the sky. We think of heaven in terms of a spiritual realm, like when Christians die, they go to heaven.

That is, their spirits go to heaven. It's like where the throne of God is, where the angels are. We have these ideas of heaven partly because of the book of Revelation.

We see these visions of heaven. There was a little bit of that also in the Old Testament, as, for example, Micaiah's vision of God and the heavenly hosts around him. But heaven is used in the Scripture more frequently, not of the heavenly realm where God is, but of the sky.

The birds fly in the heavens. Actually, the stars were placed in the heavens. Up into heaven means up into the sky, primarily.

Where did Elijah actually end up going? Did he not die? Did he go to heaven alive? As we sometimes imagine that Enoch must have done. These are things that are not really answered in Scripture for us. We are told that Enoch did not die.

We're told that in Hebrews chapter 11. Enoch walked with God, and he was not. And he did not see death, because the Lord took him.

So Enoch, of course, in the ages before the flood of Noah, actually was taken somewhere without dying. God took him, but not in death, as he takes most people when he takes them. He didn't see death.

But where he went or what his condition was after that, we are not told. It would seem somewhat strange for Enoch, in his physical body without dying, to actually go up into heaven, since heaven is really, as we think of it, where we go when we die is a spiritual place, not a physical. Our bodies stay here, and our spirits go to heaven.

The angels who live there are spirits. God who lives there is a spirit. It seems like it's a habitation of spirits, not of bodies.

Although, of course, it's not impossible to imagine that God, you know, made some kind of changes in Enoch's body, as he did in Christ's body in his resurrection. And Enoch was translated like the church will be. When we are caught up, this mortality, we call it immortality, and it's possible that there were glorification of Enoch.

We aren't given any information about that. Now, Elijah and Enoch are often said to be the two men who went to heaven without dying. But neither of them are said specifically to have gone into heaven.

This one says he was carried up into heaven, but it's talking about the heaven that a whirlwind can carry you up into. If you're caught in a tornado, it'll throw you up into heaven too, but not necessarily the spiritual heavens. Up into the sky.

Now, the other prophets that we're looking on, we're not sure where Elijah was taken, and they thought he might have been actually taken up temporarily and thrown down somewhere, and that they ought to go look for him. We'll see that in a few minutes in the later verses that we're coming to. But the point here is that we're not told that Elijah did not die, or that he did die.

It is perhaps correct that we should assume that he didn't die, but it's not told us that. So, all we know is, and all we're really told is a whirlwind took him up into the air, into the sky, and that's the last anyone saw of him. Although later on, one of the kings of Israel received a letter from him.

So, some people think he didn't die, and he didn't go to heaven, but that he actually was just taken up and separated from the society of the other prophets and of people, but was still somewhere on the earth where he could write letters from and so forth. But Frank has shared with us that if you look at the chronology correctly, that letter could have been sent by Elijah during his lifetime. We'll consider that later when we come to the proper passages.

Anyway, this is where Elijah was seen for the last time on earth. And it says, now, Elisha saw it, which means, of course, that he, according to the terms that Elijah had given, Elisha would now receive what he requested. The double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Elisha saw it, and he cried out, my father, my father, which is just a term referring to my mentor, my spiritual leader. The chariot of Israel and its horsemen. Now, it might be that we would understand this to be a reference to that chariot of fire that he saw, and maybe so.

But, he is referring to Elijah as the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. And later on, when Elisha was himself dying in chapter 13 of this book, the king came to him and grieved



that Elisha was dying and called him the chariot of Israel and of God and its horsemen and so forth. The idea is that chariots and horsemen are defenses.

They are armies. They are the strength of a nation. Speaking, you know, in an earthly sense.

And so, the prophets of God were the defense of the nation. Ahab had referred to Elijah as the troubler of Israel. But, Elisha knew him more in his correct role.

He's the defense of Israel. His influence kept Israel from being utterly destroyed for its idolatry. He was the defender of Israel.

He was like the chariot and horsemen of Israel. And so, Elisha would so be described later on as well. So, he saw him no more.

And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. Now, whether he tore them into two pieces so that he could put on Elijah's clothes in their place, or whether this was a sign of grief, as the rending of one's garments sometimes would be. Usually, if someone tore their garments, they didn't tear them into two pieces.

They just tore them at the neck a little bit. And the ripping of the garment was a sign of angst or grief. Maybe even repentance.

But, here he didn't just tear his garment. He tore it into two pieces. Tore it in half.

Which made it, of course, something he couldn't wear anymore. And then he took up Elijah's mantle that had fallen from him and struck the water and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? That is, is God now with Elisha as he was with Elijah? Let's see. And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that, and Elisha crossed over.

This question, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? is one that we might well ask ourselves. Where is he? You know, the God who worked miracles. The God who spoke clear words of prophecy to his servant.

Where is that God now? Well, of course, that God is with Jesus, in Jesus and in his people. And yet we don't see the demonstrations of that power, of the presence of God of Elijah in our time very much. Maybe occasionally, but not much.

I remember Leonard Ravenhill had a sermon he preached where he said, Where are the Elijahs of God? Now, where is the God of Elijah? He's here. But where are the Elijahs of God? Where are the men who have the faith of Elijah and the commitment of Elijah who can rise up and lay hold on God like Elijah did and stand in the gap as Elijah did? Where are the people who are like Elijah? Leonard Ravenhill's sermon, I think, was suggesting that we'd see more of the God of Elijah manifest if there were more Elijahs through whom God could manifest them. I don't know that, I mean, that may be true, but we do

have to admit that not everyone's called to the same kind of ministry as Elijah had, even in his own day.

Not all godly people were doing the things Elijah was doing. That prophetic calling is not universal. Even in the New Testament where the spirit of prophecy, the spirit of God, has been given to all God's people.

Paul still said in 1 Corinthians 12, Are all apostles? Are all prophets? The implication is no, not all are. There is a special calling. And Elisha found that the God of Elijah was now with Elisha.

And that's what the other prophets saw. They witnessed this from a distance, the 50. And it says when he crossed over in the same miraculous way that Elijah had led him across to the east, he now went back to the west, over to the other side on dry ground.

It says, 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. In all likelihood, Elijah had been recognized as the mentor and the instructor, the, what shall we say, the chancellor of the schools of the prophets.

As Samuel had been in an earlier generation, when he apparently established those groups, Samuel was clearly the one ministering above them and among them as their mentor and leader. Elijah probably served in that role in his lifetime. And now Elisha is recognized by them as his successor.

So they come and bow down before him, not to worship him, but to acknowledge God's anointing upon him and their recognition of him being to them as Elijah was. Then they said to him, Look, now there are 50 strong men with your servants. Please let us go and search for your master.

Lest perhaps the spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley. And he said, You shall not send anyone. Now they were not sure what had happened to Elijah.

Maybe he's, you know, the Lord took him up out of our sight and then deposited him somewhere else. Maybe we should go looking for him. Maybe he's injured.

I mean, why look for him unless he is injured? I mean, if he's okay, why should we go find him? If God took him away from us, why should we go try to retrieve him? Especially when it's clear that the spirit of Elijah was now in Elisha. He clearly has been succeeded by another. And so Elisha says, Don't bother.

But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he got embarrassed of continuing to say no. He said, Well, send them out. Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days, but did not find him.

And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, Did I not say to you don't go? Now, I guess this little story about them searching for three days for Elijah is there to satisfy the reader that Elijah wasn't just caught up in a tornado of natural origins. Such a tornado might catch a person up and it's going to deposit them somewhere. They're going to be thrown down somewhere.

So as they searched all over for three days, fifty men, the whole region, that's no doubt to satisfy us that okay, he was taken up permanently. He was not. This was not a natural phenomenon that he happened to succumb to, but it was God taking him up permanently away.

Then the men of the city, apparently Jericho, said to Elijah, Please notice the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord sees, but the water is bad, and the ground is barren. Something was not pure there in the water, and it did not allow crops to grow, and it probably wasn't very good for drinking. They probably had to boil the water or something.

We don't know what was wrong with the water. 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, the spring, and cast in the salt there, and said, Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water. From it there shall be no more death or barrenness. So the water remains healed to this day, according to the saying of Elijah, which he spoke.

Now there is a very good fresh water source at that location in Jericho today. Probably the same source, very good water. But at one time it must have had some kind of minerals in it, or something that made it not potable.

And that's usually what would make the water bad, is its mineral contents. But adding salt to it certainly would not in the natural have any effect on that. I mean, you couldn't heal a continual torrent of water that's coming out of the ground by putting some salt in the water at the head.

This obviously was a symbolic action. Now what did salt symbolize? I don't know. Who knows? Purity, perhaps? But it may be that some of the actions involved were simply almost arbitrary actions that were intended that the prophet must actually do something visible in order that the result would be attributed to him.

That is, to what he did. As opposed to him just saying, Oh, the water's going to be good, and then later, lo and behold, it is good. Well, maybe it's a coincidence.

But actually by him doing some active, visible thing, and the result coming from it, it would more cement in the mind that this was an act that was accomplished by this prophet. Now, it would be important for people to recognize that God was working

through this prophet. I mean, it's important that they recognize God himself as the source of the miracles.

But also to recognize which man God was using. Because, as a prophet, he'd be speaking for God, and people would have to be sure that this is the man whose words would be trusted as being from God. And therefore, the miracles were given, and closely tied to him.

Just as in the days of Peter in the book of Acts, in chapter 5, Peter's shadow was often associated with healing. Just so that people would recognize that it wasn't just a coincidence that these people got healed, but it was when Peter's shadow fell upon them. That confirmed that Peter was the man that God was using, and therefore that they should listen to him.

And likewise, when Paul had aprons and handkerchiefs taken from him, and people were healed by those because they came from Paul. It was not magic. It was God's way of giving his endorsement to a particular servant, so that people would listen to him.

And recognize, okay, this is the man that God is endorsing with these miracles. Now it says, and he went up from there, verse 23, to Bethel. Which is, he's kind of retracing his steps that he and Elijah had gone earlier that day.

And he had, it says, and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city, and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, you bald head! Go up, you bald head! Now their statement is strange, and obviously, calling him bald head is a mockery. They're mocking him because he was bald headed. And, I don't really know what the stigma was, of a man having a bald head in those days.

It couldn't have been very rare. But, it was possible that a man whose hair had gone was viewed as one who had less virility than in his youth, when he had a full head of hair, and therefore was considered to be past his prime. A man who might be inconsequential, no one to be respected, not having any youthful vigor or powers, and therefore, you know, mocking him perhaps as somebody who's old and past his prime would be impossible to have in mind.

Now the go up part, it's not clear what that means, and most scholars seem to think it's an allusion to Elijah going up. Now these people in Bethel would not necessarily have been there, or seen Elijah go up. And, but the report of it perhaps had spread around, so they'd heard rumors that Elijah had gone up.

They might have even doubted them. But, in telling Elisha, go up, go up, they may have been saying, you know, your master allegedly went up, let's see if you can do that. Kind of mocking him.

To find out whether he, they might have been mocking the report that Elijah had gone

up. Or they might have been saying, if your master has gone up, why don't you show us that you've got the powers to do the same thing. In any case, whatever their meaning was, it was a mockery, and it was an insult.

So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths. Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

Now, I said earlier that the miracles that Elisha did, unlike those of Elijah, tended to be miracles of blessing rather than judgment. This might seem to be an exception, and it is true, a judgment came as a result of his curse. We do not read that Elisha called bears down on these.

He just cursed them. They were cursing him and mocking him, and he simply uttered a curse upon them. That just means a curse can be a very general thing.

Just like a blessing. You can say, oh, God bless you. It's not very specific in its content.

Or God curse you. The point is here that they were mocking the prophet of God, and by extension, God. There are traditions among the Jews that these were Baal-worshipping youths, and that they were mocking Yahweh.

Whether that's true or not, we don't know. The King James Version calls them children, which really has bothered a lot of people when they read the King James, that these children came out and were mocking him, and he called down these bears to kill these children. But the word youth is better.

The Hebrew word is used, for example, in the book of Genesis, speaking of Joseph when he was 17 years old. A young man. These were young men, irreverent, mocking Yahweh's servant, and through him, intending to, of course, show irreverence to Yahweh.

Thus deserving the curse of Yahweh. And Elisha pronounced that curse, and Yahweh decided on how that would be fulfilled. It might not even have happened at that moment.

We're just told that at some point in time, maybe immediately, maybe not immediately, we're not told any past time, but 42 of these youths were mauled by two bears. And it may be that that was later recognized, oh that must be because of the curse that Elisha had brought upon us. Now if it happened immediately, there'd be no mistake about it.

If it happened sometime later, it might be that the townspeople would have the choice of thinking it was or not, and some recognized that it was. The main thing is that these bears mauled these people who were mocking Yahweh. Well, blasphemy was always punishable by death under the law.

If they were also Baal worshippers, that was punishable by death. For them to die at the claws of bears, rather than armies or fire from heaven or some other way, is no more just or unjust than any other way for God to take them out. God sent the bears, and these people died for their sacrilege and for their lack of reverence for Yahweh.

As many others did in other circumstances. Well, we need to stop there.