

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 1
THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS
CHAPTER 1-2**

INTRODUCTION

A bird's eye-view of the kings of Israel as recorded in the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings should help us see the development of the history of Israel as a monarchy. The first book of Samuel narrates the *transition* of Israel from theocracy to monarchy. Saul, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, became the first king of Israel.

The second book of Samuel features God's rejection of King Saul and his descendants to rule the nation. In his stead, God chose David, the son of Jesse, to become the next king of Israel. The first book of Kings relates the death of David and the ascension of his son, Solomon, to the throne. The reign of Solomon was not as illustrious as his father, David. It was during Solomon's reign that the division of the kingdom was decreed. It was a consequence of his sins. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam became king, he was unable to hold the nation together. It resulted in the division of the nation into two parts: the northern kingdom comprising the ten tribes was

subsequently known as Israel, and the southern kingdom comprising two tribes was later known as Judah.

The closing chapter of 1 Kings records the death of Ahab, the king of the northern kingdom, Israel (1 Kings 22:37, 40). He was shot by a "stray" arrow in a battle against the Syrians. In Judah, Jehoshaphat, a descendant of the house of David, reigned as king. In offering his military assistance to Ahab to fight against the Syrians, Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life, if it had not been for the providence of God. 2 Kings relates historically the end of both the northern and southern kingdoms, namely, Israel and Judah.

However, God had not cast Israel aside despite the exile. Israel was still His chosen people according to His universal plan of salvation for mankind. Israel, the northern kingdom, is featured in the first ten chapters. The predominant prophet of God to Israel was Elisha who succeeded Elijah. The next seven chapters alternate between the annals of the two kingdoms culminating in the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. From chapter 18 to the end of the book, the focus is on the history of Judah, the southern kingdom. It also ended with the invasion by the Babylonians who took a great number of Jews into Babylon as slaves. These included Daniel and Ezekiel.

OUTLINE

1. Ahaziah Consults Baal-Zebub—(1:1-8);

2. Ahaziah Meets Elijah (1:9-18);
3. Elijah's Last Journey (2:1-18);
4. The Spring of Elisha (2:19-22);
5. Punishment of the Boys (2:23-25);

COMMENTARY

2 Kings begins with Ahaziah in Israel after the death of his father Ahab. Ahaziah was very ill because he suffered a serious fall. At that time, the Moabites, a long time enemy of Israel, were politically and militarily quite strong. They took advantage of the current weak condition of Israel and staged a rebellion against her. The Moabite rebellion is briefly mentioned at this juncture for chronological reasons to relate it with the reign of Ahaziah. The details of the battle are described in chapter 3.

Ahaziah Consults Baal-Zebub

– 1:1-8

Ahaziah was seriously ill. He sent messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron, which was about 72 kilometres south of Samaria. Ekron was then famous because of the chief god of the Philistines, Baal. Ahaziah sent his messengers to consult Baal-Zebub in that city. The name "Baal-Zebub" is a compound of two words. The first "Baal" means "lord" and "Zebub" means "a fly"; and the name literally means "lord of the flies."¹ This could suggest that Baalzebub was

believed to be a god, which could ward off plagues that were caused by flies.

It was quite a distance for Ahaziah to send his messengers to Ekron to seek help from a Philistine god when he could have easily found it in Jerusalem. His action was a sin against the LORD God of Israel. He sought help in the wrong place and was guilty of the sin of idolatry, pride, arrogance and disobedience. So the angel of the LORD summoned the prophet Elijah to intercept and confront Ahaziah's messengers. The king's mission to seek the help from a pagan god was a direct insult to YAHWEH who is Israel's God – could not YAHWEH tell the king concerning his illness? Elijah told the messengers "thus saith the LORD" that Ahaziah would not recover and he would surely die. Elijah's ministry as God's prophet ended with this prophecy before he was taken away.

The king's messengers turned back to Samaria. When the king expressed his surprise that they had returned so quickly, they reported that they met "a man" who told them to return to Samaria and to say to the king that God was displeased with his action and that he would not recover and would surely die. This suggests that the messengers did not recognise Elijah who could have kept himself in seclusion for a time. Elijah, as we have known, was in the habit of suddenly presenting himself before the king or the people. Upon the command of the king, the messengers described Elijah as a hairy man whose garment was strapped by a leather girdle at the

¹ Compare Mark 3:22-30, during the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, Baalzebub was known as the prince of the devils.

² Compare KJV Matthew 25:45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you,

waist. Straightaway, Ahaziah recognised him as Elijah.

Ahaziah Meets Elijah – 1:9-18

King Ahaziah despatched a contingent of fifty soldiers and a captain to order Elijah to see him. The motive for the king's summoning of Elijah is not mentioned. By the look of it, it seems that the king sought to intimidate Elijah if he refused to appear before the king. This explains why he sent such a big contingent of soldiers to convey his message to Elijah. The captain's request to Elijah was abrupt and rude: "You, man of God, the king has said, Come down" (1:9). Surely this request if it is meant to be a cordial invitation is inappropriately disrespectful and brash. Elijah replied that if he were a man of God as they said he was, he would call upon the LORD to pour down fire from heaven to consume them. The LORD heard Elijah's words and sent fire down to consume the captain and his soldiers! Ahaziah obviously waited in vain, and when the first batch did not return, he might have guessed their fate. So, he sent another contingent.

The captain of the second contingent behaved even worse than the first one. He commanded Elijah to "come down quickly" (1:11). Elijah responded in the same manner as the first and the result was the same too. The second batch of soldiers and their captain did not return. Ahaziah was determined to meet with Elijah.

He sent a third contingent. The captain of this contingent behaved himself more humbly than his predecessors. When he approached

Elijah, he fell on his knees before him. This was an act of humility and submission. Instead of speaking disrespectfully and brashly, he pleaded with Elijah to spare his life and that of his soldiers from being consumed by fire from heaven. This means that news had reached the soldiers why the two previous contingents did not return. The angel of the LORD then assured Elijah not to be afraid; thus confirming that Elijah's life was in danger if he had gone in the first place. The LORD told Elijah to go down with the captain to meet the king.

When Elijah met Ahaziah, he accused the king of denying the God of Israel by seeking the counsel of a pagan god. This was a serious sin. The LORD pronounced His judgement on the king through Elijah that he would not recover from his illness and that he would surely die (1:16). Ahaziah died just as Elijah said according to the Word of the LORD. Jehoram acceded to the throne. He was the brother of Ahaziah who had no son. In Judah to the south, the reigning king was the son of Jehoshaphat who had the same name, Jehoram

Elijah's Last Journey – 2:1-18

The divine writer indicated that the LORD was going to translate Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind (2:1)! Elijah knew that God was ending his ministry. Having left Samaria, Elijah went to Gilgal. He wanted to leave Gilgal for Bethel. Elisha followed him. But he told Elisha to stay in Gilgal while he alone proceeded to Bethel. Since Elijah had first called Elisha to

be his disciple, the latter had been faithful and loyal to him (1 Kings 19:21). Elijah knew that Elisha was God's prophet chosen to continue his prophetic ministry when he was gone. But human responsibility dictates that Elisha realises and accepts the high calling from God. Hence the reason behind Elijah's response of trying to "get rid" of Elisha!

Now Gilgal was an important place in the history of the children of Israel. Gilgal was the first city in the Promised Land that Israel entered after 40 years of wilderness wandering. It was in Gilgal that the children of Israel were commanded by the LORD to circumcise all the male children. The name sake means roll away. Gilgal was the place of new beginning for the nation, Israel. God raised Joshua then as the new leader to lead the children of Israel in place of Moses who was taken to glory. The symbolic significance of the event of circumcision in Gilgal was clear. It symbolises the rolling away of sins and of 40 years of wilderness wandering owing to the sins of the forefathers of Israel. Over 600,000 of them died in the wilderness. On a more positive note, it was like a new beginning in a new land, the Land of Promise! There are tremendous and precious spiritual lessons that Elisha could learn from the history of the places.

Elijah was instructed by the LORD to move to Bethel (2:2). He said to Elisha that he should remain in Gilgal. But Elisha rejected the suggestion. He was determined to go with Elijah to Bethel. Elijah did not

persist with his instruction to Elisa. They both took off to Bethel. The city of Bethel was also rich in history for the people of Israel. The word "Bethel" means "the house of God" ("beth" = house; "El" = God). It is recorded that when Abraham first came to Canaan, he built an altar there unto the LORD (Genesis 12:9). He called upon the name of the LORD and worshipped Him.

Many years later, Jacob, his grandson, who was fleeing from his brother Esau, came to Bethel. He slept there. He dreamt the heavens opened and there was a ladder reaching to the earth with angels of God going up and down (see Gen. 28). The LORD reiterated His covenantal promise to him in the dream. When he woke up, he was afraid. He built an altar and made a vow and called upon the name of the LORD (Genesis 28:12-22). It meant an entrance to heaven itself to Jacob.

Elijah said to Elisha that he was going to Jericho. He told Elisha again to stay in Bethel. But Elisha insisted that he too would go with his master to Jericho. So Elijah and Elisha together proceeded to Jericho. In Jericho, Elisha was asked by the young prophets whether he knew that the LORD would be taking his master away that day. Elisha answered that he knew.

Elijah told Elisha that he was proceeding to Jordan and again said to Elisha to stay put in Jericho. But Elisha would not leave his master. They took off for Jordan. The young prophets followed and stood some distance

away while Elijah and Elisha proceeded to cross the river Jordan. Elijah took off his mantle, rolled it together and smote the waters of Jordan. The waters miraculously were divided so that they crossed the river on dry ground.

When both of them had crossed to the other side of Jordan, Elijah then said to Elisha, "Ask what shall I do for thee, before I be taken away from thee" (2:9). Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit to be upon him. Elisha was asking for twice as much of Elijah's inner spirit that motivated the great prophet. The task ahead for Elisha was enormous and the responsibilities that lay before him awesome. Elisha wished that Elijah's mighty ability might continue to live through him. Elijah replied that only God could grant him his wish. Elijah was honest to him that he was unable to do it. He then told Elisha that if he could see him taken away from him, that would be the sign that God had granted his request. And as they were talking, Elijah was taken away in a whirlwind into heaven in a fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses. It was a spectacular sight. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen" (2:12). The expression shows that Elisha considered Elijah as his spiritual father and he was claiming the double portion of inheritance of an eldest son – definitely not for land but for his spirit. As for "the chariot of Israel", he considered Elijah as equivalent to the whole army of Israel – powerful!

Elisha therefore witnessed the taking up of Elijah and saw him no more. He picked up Elijah's mantle, which fell to the ground and returned to cross the Jordan back to Israel. At the bank of Jordan, he repeated what Elijah earlier did. He smote the water with Elijah's mantle and it parted as he walked across on dry ground. The young prophets who had been on the other side of Jordan witnessed the first miracle done by Elisha. They testified that "the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2:15). They approached him and paid obeisance to him. God has a way of answering the desire of His servant.

The young prophets were ignorant of what had actually taken place. They asked Elisha for permission to scout around and search for the body of Elijah. They wanted an on-site verification of the disappearance of Elijah. They did not perceive that the natural whirlwind was the means by which God took Elijah to heaven. Obviously, they did not see Elijah taken up in a chariot of fire. They thought Elijah might have been blown away by the whirlwind and cast somewhere in some valley. Elisha initially forbade them but they kept urging him till he relented. Elisha then let them go. Of course, their search for Elijah was futile. They returned to Jericho where Elisha was. Elisha had earlier told them not to go, and he was right. Now their confidence in Elisha was strengthened.

The Spring of Elisha – 2:19-22

Elisha's first miracle in the city of Jericho was the healing of a polluted

spring. Most biblical geographers identify this spring as the Ain-es-Sultan, which is the only spring near ancient Jericho. It is today popularly known as “the Spring of Elisha”.

The inhabitants of Jericho recognised that their city was beautiful. It was situated in the midst of a vast grove of palm trees in the plain of Jordan. But they complained that the source of water from the spring was not good. They pleaded with Elisha to “heal” the water. Elisha then asked for a bowl of salt. He then ceremoniously poured the salt onto the spring of the waters. The spring was miraculously purified. It was not the salt that purified or “healed” the spring. As Elisha pronounced when he poured the salt onto the spring, “Thus saith the LORD”, it was God who healed the spring. The salt was only a symbol. It was God that showed mercy to the community in Jericho.

Punishment of the Boys – 2:23-25

Elisha left Jericho to go to Bethel. On the way, he met a group of “little children” of the city of Bethel. The “little children” should be understood as youths who are equivalent to school boys in year ten and above. They were naughty boys. They were mocking Elisha for no other reason than the fact that Elisha was bald, and that he was a prophet. They jeered at him repeatedly saying, “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.” Since Elisha was on his way to Bethel, their jeering can be paraphrased: “Beat it, baldy; beat it baldy; go away.” It should be understood that the mocking was not merely good-natured fun. It was

deadly serious. The taunting was disrespectful to God’s prophet. It was tantamount to insulting God whom Elisha served. Moreover, Bethel at that time was chief centre of pagan calf worship (1 Kings 12:28, 29). The youths were guilty of the act of deriding God by deriding His prophet.² In addition, their jeering put Elisha’s prophetic ministry in jeopardy. The youth’s taunting had to be dealt with decisively. Elisha cursed them in the name of the LORD. Suddenly two female bears emerged from the forest and “tare” (mauled) forty-two of the youths. The text did not say that they were killed. It might indicate that they were seriously injured.

PRACTICAL VALUE

God sometimes sends troubles to us for the purpose of giving us another opportunity to repent and turn to Him from our sinful ways. Ahaziah’s fall could be fatal. God could have taken his life and that was it. But that he was seriously injured offered him the chance to turn away from his idolatrous worship to God. But he failed to discern in taking the right steps to return to worshipping the one living and true God.

God being a righteous God will ensure that His judgement is always just. Ahaziah had first-hand knowledge of the Word of God through Elijah. But he disregarded the Word of God repeatedly. He had no excuse.

² Compare KJV Matthew 25:45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say **unto** you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to **me**.

Similarly, God deals with all people in like manner. If people will pause, think and look around, there is no lack of evidence of God's mercies in all His creation, and His Word, which He preserves through the ages so that man will repent from his sinful ways and acknowledge His Creator God!

If God is for His people, there is nothing and no one to fear (Romans 8:31). Ahaziah could send as many soldiers to intimidate Elijah and force him to see him. But if God did not permit His prophet to go, it would be futile, and the enemy might even face a more terrible consequence.

God's Word is always true. God does not lie. What He has said will come true. The LORD had finished striving with Ahaziah. God had pronounced that he would not recover from his illness and that he would surely die. The divinely inspired writer unmistakably states "*So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken*" (1 Kings 1:17a). We need to take heed of God's Word.

The passing of baton to another in the service of God is an important process. Elijah knew that God would take him away and his ministry had come to an end. But before he was taken away, he had to prepare Elisha. He started from Gilgal where he was with Elisha. Leaving Gilgal, he took him to Bethel, then Jericho and finally crossed the Jordan. All these places are significant and they taught Elisha valuable spiritual lessons. Gilgal reminded Elisha of the beginning of the new and the ending of the old.

Bethel reminded Elisha of our eternal home in heaven and that we are pilgrims on this earth. Keeping a constant and close communication with God is required of the servant of God who wants to have power in his ministry. Jericho reminded Elisha of the first fruits of our victories that signifies that our future ministries belong to God. All glory must be given to Him and that we are only his servants and trustees of His vineyard!

The characteristics of being humble, loyal and true are hallmarks of a God-loving and God-fearing Christian. Elijah and Elisha set the example. His faithfulness and loyalty to his master exemplifies what we must also do today. He learned many precious spiritual lessons from Elijah. We must be humble and always await patiently God's timing before our service begins and learn to handover graciously when our service ends. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 2 Kings 1:1-8; Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

TUESDAY: 2 Kings 1:9-18; Hebrews 12:29; 1 John 2:15-17.

WEDNESDAY: 2 Kings 2:1-8; Psalm 48:9-14; 2 Timothy 2:1-4.

THURSDAY: 2 Kings 2:9-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

FRIDAY: 2 Kings 2:19-25; Matthew 5:13; Hebrews 13:7.

Discussion Questions

1. From the account given in 2 Kings 1, how would you characterise King Ahaziah?

2. What abominable sin did King Ahaziah commit which incurred the displeasure of God? Would you consider it an abominable sin if God had not revealed that it was so to Him? List 2 other sins that are abominable to God in the Bible!

3. What seems to be the reason for Ahaziah to send a military contingent to “find” Elijah?

4. What principle can we draw from 2 Kings 1 so that we can live in a manner that is both honouring to God and beneficial to us?

5. In what specific way does God show His approval of Elijah and Elisha’s ministries in 2 Kings 1 and 2?

6. In what ways was Elisha tested (2 Kings 2:1-15)? What qualities in him does his conduct reveal?

7. Why did Elisha cross the river Jordan in the same way as Elijah did? How important was it for the young prophets to witness the same event?

9. What lessons have you learned in these two chapters that have helped you in building up yourselves and guided your life?

8. At Bethel, which was a centre of apostate Israelite calf worship, a gang of youngsters insulted Elisha. Do you think the punishment fits the crime?
