



Second Kings - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Like his father Ahab, Ahaziah is destined to meet Elijah. The occasion for their confrontation is an injury sustained by the king when falling out the window of his upper chamber in Samaria. He decides to seek guidance from a pagan god rather than the Lord and so Elijah sends the Lord's judgement on him. In response Ahaziah sends soldiers to arrest Elijah but fire from heaven consumes the first two groups; the leader of the third group seeks Elijah's mercy and an angel instructs Elijah to go with him. The chapter concludes with his death and the succession of his brother Jehoram as Ahaziah had no sons.

I 2 Kings 1:1-18 - King Ahaziah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

I.a 2 Kings 1:1-16 - Elijah Denounces Ahaziah

Ahaziah is injured in a accident and sends out messengers to seek the word of Baal as to whether he would recover. The Lord was angry with Ahaziah because the king did not seek him but turned to Baal instead, so God instructed Elijah to tell the messengers that the king would die from his injuries.

When the king heard of this he sent men to bring Elijah to him. When the soldiers arrived Elijah called on God to reign down fire and consume them. This the Lord did. It happened a second time but on the third occasion, the captain of the guard called for mercy and the angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to go with the soldiers. This, however, would not change God's judgement on this apostate king.

¹ After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

2 Kings 1:1

After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel. More on this rebellion will be related in Chapter 3. It is mentioned here to make the point that, whereas the relatively righteous Jehoshaphat maintained his control of other nations, i.e. Edom in 1 Kings 22:47, Ahab's Baal-worshipping son did not. An inscribed stone monument of King Mesha of Moab, commonly known as the 'Mesha Inscription' or 'Moabite Stone', probably refers to this same Moabite rebellion; refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 3:4-27.

The reign of Ahab was a spiritual disaster for the northern kingdom, but it was a time of political security and economic prosperity. After his death the kingdom of Moab realised it was a good opportunity to remove their nation from the domination of Israel. The land of Moab was immediately east of the Dead Sea and shared an indefinite border with Israel to the north at approximately the point where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea. Moab had been under Israelite domination since the days of David; refer to 2 Samuel 8:2 and 8:11-12. This rebellion of Moab in the days of Ahaziah is significant as it indicates the decline of Israel's power and the judgement of God upon them.

² Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, 'Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.'

2 Kings 1:2

Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria. This was surely an unexpected crisis. Such accidents happen to kings and peasants alike: <<*for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*>> (Matthew 5:45b). The king apparently leaned against the wooden screen and fell through from the second floor balcony to the ground below.

Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel from the time of Omri: <<*He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill*>> (1 Kings 16:24) until the fall of the northern kingdom under Hoshea recorded in 2 Kings Chapter 17.

Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury. Ahaziah showed that he was a true worshipper of the pagan god Baal-zebub because he turned instinctively to this idol in his time of trouble.

Ekron was an important Philistine city about 25 miles or 40 km west of Jerusalem.

Baal-zebub means ‘lord of the flies’ and is probably a deliberate Hebrew corruption of Baal-zebul, meaning ‘Baal the exalted’ or ‘Baal/master of the height’ or possibly ‘Baal/master of the dwelling’, intended to express the authors’ scorn of or hostility toward this so-called deity. Ahaziah looks for help from this local manifestation of the idol Baal, perhaps regarding the Ekronite version of the deity as especially powerful. His name suggests that Baal-zebub was a god who warded off plagues that were brought on by flies. There are numerous references to fly gods in classical literature.

In Matthew 10:25, Jesus uses the term Baal-zebul or Beelzebul as a term relating to Satan.

By turning to Baal-zebul Ahaziah was following in the footsteps of his wicked parents: *<<And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made a sacred pole. Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him>>* (1 Kings 16:31-33)

³ But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, ‘Get up, go 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 Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” ⁴ Now therefore, thus says the Lord, “You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.”’ So Elijah went.

2 Kings 1:3-4

In a scene reminiscent of the opening verses of 1 Kings Chapter 19, the Lord sends an angel, Hebrew *mal’ak*, in response to other people’s sending messengers, also Hebrew *mal’ak*.

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub? There is little doubt that King Ahaziah believed that Yahweh lived, but he lived as if there were no God in Israel. He was a practical atheist, and the way he sought Baal-zebub instead of the Lord demonstrated this.

You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die. Ahaziah did not seek help from the real God; therefore he will get no real help. Instead this will be an occasion for the real God to send a message of judgement upon King Ahaziah.

When ancients sought their gods about medical issues the result was usually given in medical prognostic texts as to whether he will live or die as in v.6 and v.16. This means that Elijah's words <<*you shall surely die*>> were phrased as a medical diagnosis. It was as if Elijah said, "Here's your diagnosis Ahaziah: Your condition is fatal and irreversible." In fact, this was a mercy to Ahaziah. God told him something that few people know - that his death was imminent and that he had time to repent and prepare to meet God. This prophetic announcement might also explain why Ahaziah did not want to seek an answer from the Lord: he knew what the answer would be. In seeking Baal-zebub for an answer Ahaziah may have wanted to find a god to tell him what he wanted to hear.

⁵ The messengers returned to the king, who said to them, 'Why have you returned?' ⁶ They answered him, 'There came a man to meet us, who 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 are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but shall surely die.'" ⁷ He said to them, 'What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?' ⁸ They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.' He said, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite.'

2 Kings 1:5-8

There came a man to meet us. Although they were sent to seek a word from the pagan priests of Baal-zebub, the word from Elijah persuaded them so much that they did not complete their original mission. This official delegation from the king would certainly not have turned back from their royal assignment just because some anonymous wayfarer asked them to. There must have been an irresistible quality to Elijah's personality, a forceful spiritual presence that compelled them to obey this stranger even though they did not know who he was.

A hairy man. The Hebrew is literally 'He was a man who was a lord/owner of hair' – possibly a play on words with 'lord of the flies' in v.2. The 'hair' could be either animal or human, which is why translations of the Hebrew have varied between 'garment of hair' and 'hairy', i.e. suggesting Elijah was long-haired and bearded.

Identifying Elijah by his clothes also connected him to the ministry of John the Baptist, who dressed in hairy skins from animals: <<*Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey*>> (Matthew 3:4). When the priests and Levites saw him they wanted to know if he was the returning Elijah: <<*This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the*

Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’>> (John 1:19-21). It was expected that Elijah would return to the people of Israel as a sign that judgement was approaching: <<Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes>> (Malachi 4:5).

⁹ Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, ‘O man of God, the king says, “Come down.”’ ¹⁰ But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

¹¹ Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. He went up and said to him, ‘O man of God, this is the king’s order: Come down quickly!’ ¹² But Elijah answered them, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:9-12

The king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. The odds would seem good for fifty soldiers to be able to bring back one man, but the Lord is on Elijah’s side. This is not the first time a negative oracle addressed to a king elicits an attempt to capture the prophet who delivered it; refer to 1 Kings 13:1-7, 17:1-4 and 18:9-10.

O man of God, the king says, “Come down.” The captain here admitted the righteousness of Elijah when he called him man of God. Therefore, they were wrong in doing this, even though they were on orders from their king.

The Bible clearly teaches that God’s people owe submission to the government and governing authorities: <<Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement>> (Romans 13:1-2). Yet, in the human sphere, the Biblical command to submit is never absolute, but always conditioned by the greater responsibility to submit to God: <<But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority’>> (Acts 5:29). This commander should have resisted the ungodly and immoral command from King Ahaziah and obeyed God instead. His fifty men should have refused to obey the ungodly and immoral

command of their captain. Had they sought the Lord, knowing that Elijah was his prophet, their fate would doubtless have been very different.

If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty. The prophetic word cannot be brought under human control and the God of Mount Carmel sends fire from heaven to underline this fact: <<*Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench*>> (1 Kings 18:38). Two 'lords' vie for worship throughout the Elijah story, Baal and Yahweh, both of them identified with fire – and Ahaziah has chosen the wrong one. Here, one hundred soldiers die as a result of Ahaziah's choice to turn away from God to an idol, again showing that the sins of leaders often lead to tragic consequences for those whom they lead.

Elijah did not say, "You bet I am a man of God." Instead, he answered, "If I am a man of God." Essentially Elijah said, "You say I am a man of God even though you are not acting like it. Maybe I am and maybe I am not. Let us let God decide by fire." His trust in God was more than justified.

Some have blamed the prophet for destroying these men, by bringing down fire from heaven upon them. However, they do not consider that it was no more possible for Elijah to bring down fire from heaven, than for them to do it. God alone could send the fire; and as he is just and good, he would not have destroyed these men had there not been a sufficient cause to justify the act. It must be noted that the demands made of Elijah were wrong. A king had no right to ask such allegiance and his actions should always be subordinate to God's word. God was protecting his word and his servant.

It is interesting to note that when James and John asked if they should request fire from heaven to consume Samaritans who rejected Jesus, then the Lord was very firm in denying them such judgement: <<*When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them*>> (Luke 9:54-55). It was good that they trusted in the power of God but their response was more one of revenge rather than righteous judgement.

Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. God brought judgement on these men who acted as if Yahweh was not a real God and as if Elijah was not truly his servant. The captain commanded Elijah to come down! The man of God did not come down, but the fire of God did.

¹³ Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. So the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated him, 'O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight. ¹⁴ Look,

fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight.’¹⁵ Then the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, ‘Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.’ So he set out and went down with him to the king,¹⁶ and 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 leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.’

2 Kings 1:13-16

The captain of a third fifty with his fifty. This man shows Elijah the respect he is due as a prophet of the Lord and escapes with his life, and with the lives of his men. On the other hand, Ahaziah has his desired meeting with Elijah, and it changes nothing; the king dies (v.17).

There were many reasons why Ahaziah wanted to arrest Elijah, even though he had already heard the prophecy given through Elijah. Perhaps he wanted Elijah to reverse his word of doom and would use force to compel him to do it. Perhaps he just wanted to show his rage against this prophet who had troubled him and his father Ahab for so long. Perhaps he wanted to dramatically silence Elijah to discourage future prophets from speaking boldly against the king of Israel. God assured Elijah that he had nothing to fear from Ahaziah.

Go down with him; do not be afraid of him. It was not that God did not want Elijah to go to King Ahaziah; it was that Ahaziah, his captains and their soldiers all acted as if there were no God in Israel. When the request was made wisely and humbly, Elijah was released to go with them.

Is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? This was the same message Elijah gave to the men Ahaziah sent to inquire of Baal-zebub. The message from God did not change just because Ahaziah did not want to accept it the first time.

I.b 2 Kings 1:17-18 - Death of Ahaziah

Ahaziah dies from his injuries because he did not consult with the Lord and is succeeded by his brother Jehoram.

¹⁷ So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken. His brother Jehoram succeeded him as king in the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son.

¹⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

2 Kings 1:17-18

So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken. The proof was in the result. Elijah was demonstrated to be a man of God because his prophecy was fulfilled just as it was spoken. Ahaziah did not recover from his fall through the lattice.

Ahaziah was an evil and useless king, and a weak man. He allowed Moab to rebel despite the military strength the Israelites always had over them, and when he injured himself in an accident he sought a pagan god in Philistia rather than turning to the Lord. He had opportunities to repent but would not take them, and so he died in an apostate state to the cost of his eternal soul.

His brother Jehoram succeeded him as king because Ahaziah had no son. This Jehoram was also the son of Ahab according to 2 Kings 3:1. Ahaziah had no male descendent to pass the kingdom on to, so the throne went to his brother after the brief reign of Ahaziah. Jehoram is also referred to in Scripture as King Joram.

In the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah. This was 852 BC. The account becomes a little confusing here, because the King of Judah at that time was also named Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was also the king of Judah at the time as he co-reigned with Jehoram for five years: *<<In the fifth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah began to reign>>* (2 Kings 8:16).

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.