

THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 3: JEHOVAH VS. BAAL (2 KINGS 1)

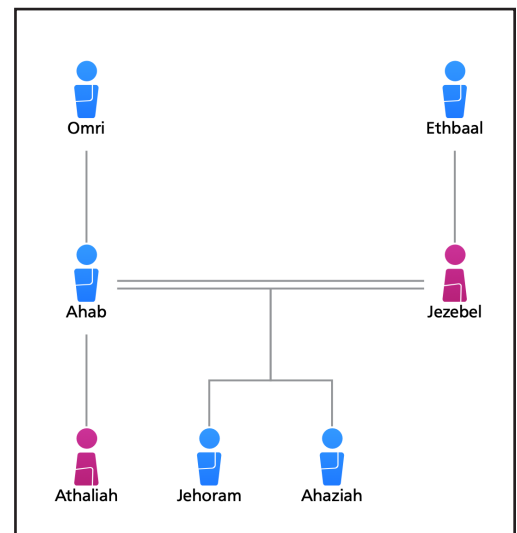
You may be surprised to find that we have skipped ahead in our study. That's because we are following a thematic outline rather than chronological. As we've stated from the outset, our aim in studying the period of time where Elijah (and Elisha) prophesied is to learn what we can about Jehovah. Our first lesson from 1Kings 17-18 focused on the contest between Jehovah and Baal. 2Kings 1 also focuses on that contest, this time looking at an episode during the reign of Ahab's son, Ahaziah.

THE REIGN OF AHAZIAH

Ahaziah's brief reign is summarized in 1Kings 22:51-53, "Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. He did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. So he served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done." (1 Kings 22:51-53, NASB95) In other words, Ahaziah did nothing to improve Israel's relationship with Jehovah.

2Kings 1:1-2 may demonstrate how the Lord's anger (1Kings 22:53) was experienced by Ahaziah as he faced rebellion and personal tragedy. The rebellion of Moab is dealt with further in chapter 3 and is commemorated in the Mesha Inscription: "I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[yatti], the king of Moab, the Daybonite. My father ruled over Moab 30 years, and I ruled after my father. And I made this high place for Kemosh in Qarho, a high place of salvation,

because he has saved me from all the kings and because he caused me to prevail over all my enemies. Now Omri, king of Israel oppressed Moab many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he also said, "I will oppress Moab." In my days he spoke this, but I prevailed over him and over his house. Now Israel utterly perished forever. Now Omri had taken possession of the land of Madaba. And he dwelt in it his days and half the days of his son, 40 years, but Kemosh restored it in my days." The rebellions of Moab, then Edom (2Kings 8:20) and Libnah (2Kings 8:22), demonstrated the weakening of Israel and Judah as they departed from the Lord. However, it's the personal tragedy of Ahaziah that drives the narrative in 2Kings 1 and allows us to not only see Jehovah's triumph over Baal (again), but also the importance of Jehovah's spokesman Elijah.



MESHA INSCRIPTION

NOTES FROM THE TEXT

As you read 2Kings 1, these notes may help illuminate the text and emphasize the magnitude of Jehovah's victory over Baal.

- Vs. 2
 - » Ahaziah's command to "go, inquire..." refers to seeking the divine will of Baal by means of an oracle, a practice forbidden by God (see Leviticus 19.31).
 - » Baal-zebub means "lord of the flies" but it may very well have been a corruption of Baal-zebul, "Baal the prince". It is quite possible that the Biblical writer chose to reference this false god with a more derogatory title.
 - » Ekron was one of the 5 most important Philistine cities, first referenced in Joshua 13.2-3.
- Vs. 3, Elijah raises the central question:

"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" We would hope that God's victory on Mt. Carmel (1Kings 18) would have cemented His place as Lord of Israel. Sadly, the people remained obstinate.
- Vs. 4, Elijah's "thus says the Lord" is not by accident. Ahaziah meant to consult an oracle of Baal. Well, here was the message of the one, true God!
- Vs. 9
 - » While we cannot be certain, the hill referenced in this verse could have been Mount Carmel. It would be a dwelling place of Elisha (2Kings 2.25; 4.25)
 - » "man of God" was a term used for a prophet (1Samuel 2.27; 9.6,10; 1Kings 13.14-18). Its use by Ahaziah's messengers does not reflect any belief they may have had in Jehovah.
- Vs. 10
 - » The use of fire is significant for two reasons. First, Baal was identified with fire and lightning, but it was Jehovah who could punish with fire from heaven (see also Genesis 19.24; Exodus 9.23-24; Numbers 11.1-3; 1Kings 18.38). Second, this links Elijah to Moses who had also "summoned" fire from the Lord (Exodus 9.23-24). Elijah and Moses before him were spokesmen of God; they could do what no oracle of Baal could!
 - » This passage also serves as the probable background of Luke 9.54. The commander and his 50 men represented Ahaziah who had rejected the Lord and His prophet. They were punished with fire. James and John thought the village of Samaria deserved the same for rejecting Jesus.
- Vs. 15, note that Ahaziah had twice commanded for Elijah to come down (vss. 9,11), but Elijah went only after the angel of the Lord told him to do so.



TAKEAWAYS

The key takeaway from this chapter is Jehovah's superiority over Baal. Ahaziah had sent his messengers to consult an oracle of Baal. He desired a divine answer as to whether

he would recover from his injuries or not. But it was Jehovah who provided the divine answer: Ahaziah would not recover (vss. 16-17). If Ahaziah had acknowledged Jehovah as "God in Israel", perhaps he would have received a more favorable response!

The role of God's prophet is also significant in this chapter. By sending to a foreign oracle, Ahaziah had rejected the Lord AND His prophet. Tragically, the Lord's spokesmen were frequently rejected:

- Moses was rejected by Israel several times, as when Korah rebelled (Numbers 16). Significantly, Moses foretold that the Lord would raise up another Prophet that the people must listen to (Deuteronomy 18.15-18).
- That prophet was Jesus (see Acts 3.22). Yet, the people also rejected His words, thus rejecting God (John 12.48). Significantly, the leaders of the people accused Jesus of working by the power of Beelzebul (Mark 3.22), likely referencing the very power that Ahaziah wished to consult.

The lesson for us is clear: listen to those clearly marked as spokesmen of God (1John 4.6). To reject them, is to reject Him!