

2 Kings 1

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[0 : 00] Let me just pray for us before we preach. Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight.

! O Lord, our God and our Redeemer. Amen.! Those who speak for God in the Old Testament. They're two lesser known stories from their lives, I think. This one's a hard one to stomach, isn't it? 102 people are burned to death in this passage.

And I wonder if you read this to people out there in the street, in the park over there. And I wonder if they'd say, look, this is a jealous God.

This is just an ancient king, a Messiah, just trying to worship in his own way, in the way of his own father. And a jealous God that wants to interrupt his life and make it all about him.

[1 : 13] And his angry, intolerant prophet who thinks that only he and his little cult are in the right. And everyone else is wrong. I wonder if that's what they'd say. Perhaps some of them wouldn't say that.

But if we're honest, we feel this horror a little bit too when we come to these passages. It's deep set within us. How can we receive encouragement, we think?

This is one of those passages we haven't liked to turn over. Turn the page just hoping our non-Christian friend is really looking too much in the coffee shop. But I want to show you that this God, right here in this passage, is gracious.

I don't want you to feel slightly less bad about what happens in this passage. I want you to glorify God. That there is a God in Israel.

He is jealous but for his people. And I want us to see his grace and glorify him. There are only two points if you're a points person. There is a God in Israel.

[2 : 15] And he is a gracious God. There is a God in Israel. He is a gracious God. So you should lower through yourself and come to him. So there is a God in Israel.

Verse 1. Launched in. After the death of Ahab. So Ahab's Israel's worst king. This is Ahaziah's father. His model.

He's been on the throne for 22 years. And he's just died. Moab here rebelled against Israel. So they just seized their chance. They've been part of the empire for a good while.

And since the days of David. Maybe over a hundred years or so. And now they've seen weakness. And they rebel. Just this sort of province. Attached to Israel.

Ahaziah is 22 when he took the throne. So when these things happen. 23, 24. He should be the picture of health. But it seems in verse 2. That the king is just as sick as the kingdom.

[3 : 15] Ahaziah falls through a lattice. It's kind of a weird domestic accident. Probably a balcony maybe in his upper bedroom. He tumbles out of his upstairs bedroom.

And he's in a pretty bad way. To have an upper chamber in these days. It's pretty rare. It's a sign of wealth. Obviously he's a king. But God here is bringing him low.

How do we know that? You might think. Maybe it's just a random accident. Well, we've been told already. That Ahaziah has provoked the Lord. So if you see just the page before in your Bibles.

1 Kings 22. The end of it. Verse 53. He served Baal and worshipped him. Baal is a neighbouring kind of idol that people worshipped as God.

And worshipped him. Provoking the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done. So he continues to provoke the Lord. The Bible tells us this. Listen. He serves Baal and carries on and God acts.

[4 : 23] In several ways. This fall is curious, isn't it? But it's meant to tip us off to something. There's actually a theme in this passage, if you noticed. There are a lot of ups and downs.

Ahaziah falls through his lattice. Verse 2. Elijah is told to go up to meet the messengers. Verse 3. Elijah in verse 9 is sitting on top of a hill. And the captains go up to him and ask him to come down. Verse 11. But fire comes down instead. Verse 12. Finally the third captain falls on his knees. And verse 13. And Elijah goes down to meet him.

There's a lot of ups and downs. And we'll see that throughout. This first fall though. As God brings him low. It should be a time to reflect. Shouldn't it? I wonder if you're...

When you suffer in life. When you have things that have gone wrong. You think... Why is this happening? What is happening in my life? That this... Is where I am.

[5 : 25] And perhaps you should wonder... Should... Is it wise to follow... Just kind of in the ways that... That my father has shown me? Or should I switch direction? Here's his first chance.

I'm saying. To repent. He's the king of Israel. He should... Worship the God of Israel. But... Ahaziah hardens his heart.

Doesn't he? We find out in the prophecy actually. That he's gone up. Verse 4. Have a look at verse 4. Is it because there's no God in Israel...

That you're going to inquire of Baal-zebub... The God of Ekron? Now therefore... Thus says the Lord... You shall not come down from the bed... To which you've gone up. But you shall surely die. He's...

He's gone up. It reveals more than just his location. God's brought him low. But what has he done? He's propped himself back up... On his cushions...

[6 : 19] And dictated. Sent messengers. Is there a God in Israel? Ahaziah doesn't seem to think so, does he?

He could send Elijah, the prophet. He's not hard to find. They find him immediately in verse 9. He could send for a prophet of Yahweh. The true God. But no.

He sends messengers. Verse 2. To Baal-zebub. As if they were not a God in Israel. To inquire of his word. Ahaziah is sending to this guy.

Whether he'll get better, isn't he? He wants to get well. He seeks... The wisdom of this world. By sending for... For Baal-zebub.

In the land of the Philistines. About a 90 mile round trip. For his messengers. So it's quite a serious thing... To do. Especially to have the patience... To wait for them to come back. He seeks the wisdom of this world.

[7 : 15] And ignores... When it comes down to it. The God of Israel. Now... I... I... It's hard to know, isn't it? But I wonder what you would do...

In this situation. Some of you will probably have been... In this type of situation. When you're fearing for your life. Where you're wondering... Will I have a next day...

A next week... A next month? People around you... Are very keen to give you advice... Aren't they at these times? They often say...

You need your family. Those who mean most of you. As well as a good doctor. We pray for wisdom... For the doctors. Yes. All of those things. But...

What do we need? Ultimately... We need to know the true God. That there is comfort... In calling to him.

[8 : 12] But even more... In that he can answer. And indeed... Even in... Not in calling to the true God... As I can't answer. Doesn't he?

We're tempted to believe... All sorts of things... About what makes life worth living. When it comes down to this moment. In these kind of moments... Where you're very ill.

The kind of fleeting pleasures... Of this world sort of... Evaporate don't they? That you kind of...

Nothing is important... When you worry that you might have... This grave illness. Everything else kind of... Turns to black. And you just think... Forget about all that nonsense.

What am I going to do? Who will you send for? Therefore... Ahaziah... Could have trusted the Lord... Yahweh. But instead... He sends messages... To the Lord of the flies.

Verse 2. That's what Baal-zeba means. Lord of the flies. It's not actually... What the Philistines called him. They called him Baal-zeba. Kind of Lord exalted. Or Lord prince.

[9 : 08] But the authors... Using this name... To show that... Whenever we exalt... In this life... If we put it in the highest place... That is not God...

It can do nothing... For us in death. Except point the flies... In the direction... Of our corpse. Baal-zeba is an idol.

He's a kind of... Self-help God. It may seem a little bit strange. Why is this guy coming... And talking to us about Baal-zeba? Fair enough. But he is a kind of...

Self-help God. And the only problem... With self-help... Is that when you're unable... To help yourself... Nothing else can help... Either. Aikazai...

Doesn't want to change course here. He's been made king... Over God's people. With all the benefits... That brings. But he doesn't want... To live in God's world. All he wants...

[10:10] Is his health back... So he can keep doing... What he was doing before. So he can keep worshipping... Baal. Sort of reminds me... A little bit of the pandemic... Where a number of people... Will have just kind of...

Thought... This... Is terrible... But we'll... We'll just wait it out... And do exactly the same thing... Afterwards. No reflection. No repentance. There's nothing... To do... Except for wait...

Until things... Are a bit better... To do exactly the same thing. Now... This is what he wants. But Baal-zeba... Just... It's kind of a mirror. He just holds up a mirror...

To Ahaziah's... And worldly... Based desires. He's hurtling... Towards the grave... From an upper chamber... And he's given one more chance...

To humble himself... But he props himself back up... On his bed... And sends messengers out... With a temporary extension request... For his life. And I kind of want to say...

[11:06] If you find yourself tempted... To look into all manner of... Other answers... Putting things in the highest place...

Health... Wealth... Whatever it might be... And it happens easily... What is the world offering you there? Is it not just the same deal... As Ahaziah has...

To be propped up... Back on your bed... For a few more years... With a mirror... Just looking into it... With your own desires... Staring back... Perhaps even a smartphone...

Is a good example... It just magnifies... Your own... Wants and desires... And sends them right back at you... If you're thinking... That's a pretty bleak picture... Fair enough...

How do we get out of this loop... Of our own desires... And the items we serve... The things that we want... But we haven't checked them... At all... And the answer is...

[12:00] We don't, isn't it? We don't get out of that loop... God... Has to break in... To our closed off... Little worlds... Doesn't he? Ahaziah sends out...

Messengers... And he doesn't want them to go... Anywhere near... The God of Israel... But they're intercepted... By God's word... God's prophet... He sends for the Lord... The flies... But he gets a response...

From the Lord of all... Colossians... Verses 5 to 6... The messengers returned to the king... And he said to them... Why have you returned? It would have been a long journey... So they've... Clearly come back too early... And they said to him... There came a man to meet us...

And he said to us... Go back to the king who sent you... And say to him... Thus says the Lord... Thus says the Lord...

Is it because there's no God in Israel... That you're sending to inquire? The answer is of course... But there is a God in Israel... And what would make you... Want to go anywhere else? There is a God of this world...

[13:08] And we have the same problem... That there are people... Who want to go anywhere else... And... It's understandable... As we go about our lives...

Serving the different gods... That we have made... What happens is... That God sends for us... Doesn't he? He has a habit... Of interrupting... Our lives... If you're sitting here...

And you're a newcomer to church... Wondering what it's all about... He's interrupting your life... Right now isn't he? We're often bothered when... Kind of Christians... Come up to us... And sort of... Talk about God...

You think it's an interruption... And the answer is... Yes it is... It is an interruption... But you're just going about... Doing the things that you want to do... Which is the objection... Right? People go... I'm just trying to do the things...

I want to do... That's understandable... But God interrupts our lives... And leads us to him... To him... He does it... That we might know...

[14:03] That this same God in Israel... Remains God today... God interrupts this 90 mile trip... For the same reason he interrupted my life... And if you're a Christian... Yours... Or the lives of your parents...

And grandparents... That you may know... That he is God... He is the God of Abraham... Isaac and... Israel... This...
 Is his world... And we are his creatures... He interrupts our lives... While we're busy walking away from him... Setting off in the opposite direction... Because... He is God...
 And that's one reason... That we know that he is God... Because he does that... He is our God... And we are his people... Now... That's my first point...
 Second point... There is a God in Israel... And he is a gracious God... So... Maybe you're trapped with me... You think this God is real...
 [14 : 59] You know... Fine... But I want to kind of run a mile... From this God... Perhaps you understand... That in Isaiah's position... He's sitting on his bed... He just wants to get better...
 He doesn't want anything else... Perhaps you get that... There are a couple of reasons... Why you might think this God is harsh... Are there one... His message back to Isaiah...
 You shall surely die... And two... The killing of the captains... And their 50s... In the rest of our time... I just want to take both of these... And turn them around...
 I want to show you that God is gracious... From here... From his word... Firstly... This prophecy is actually a second chance... For in Isaiah... It doesn't look like it is...
 Does it? You might think... What are you talking about? Sure... I know God is gracious... I've ever taught that in Sunday school... But... But not here... Not in this passage...
 [15 : 51] But I want to tell you this... This is God's call to repentance... Declarations of judgment from God... Are opportunities to repent... While we're still alive...
 Declarations of judgment from God... Are opportunities for us to repent... While we still live... If you know the story of Nineveh... Jonah... Span out of the whale...
 And he comes up to the shore... And he says... What's the message? Is it a repent and believe? No... Yet 40 days... And Nineveh will be overthrown... He says...
 But what happens? The people believed God... That's what it says... They believe him... That he will do it... And so he doesn't do it... That's what happens... If God relents... Well... Maybe...
 You know... You think... That's in the future... Ahaziah couldn't have known this... But I want to give you an example... If you want to turn there... Feel free... You don't have to... But... Just a couple of chapters earlier... In 1 Kings 21...
 [16 : 49] There's a prophecy... From Elijah... Himself... Spoken... In the days of Ahaziah's father... This is 1 Kings 21... Verses 21 onwards...
 And 3... Verse 21... We get a picture of it from there... Behold... Says Elijah... To the king... Ahaziah's father...
 Behold... I'll bring disaster upon you... I will utterly... Burn you up... And I will cut off from Ahab... Every male... Bond or free in Israel... Okay...
 That is a... That is a prophecy of judgment... Isn't it? I'm... That's... That's what the Lord is saying... But a few... Verses later...
 This... This happens... Read on... To verse 27... Ahab... And Ahab... Heard those words... And he tore his clothes... And put sackcloth on his flesh... And fasted...
 [17 : 45] And lay in sackcloth... And went about... Dejectedly... And the word of the Lord... Came to Elijah... The Tishbite... Saying... Have you seen... How Ahab... Has humbled himself...
 Before me... I will not bring... The disaster... In his days... But in his son's days... I will bring... The disaster... Upon his house... He delays this judgment...
 He... Causes God to relent... Because he... Is sorry for what he's done... He tears his clothes... Right... That's... That's what can happen...
 And... This happened a few years before... This story now... So do turn back to... To Kings 1... And... Elijah...
 Is the sign of God's judgment to Ahab... To Isaiah... Isn't he? You can kind of tell that with... With this bit where he... He sees him... You know that he remembers... This prophecy... Saying he'll bring disaster...
 [18 : 38] Because... He says... In verse 7... What kind of man was this... Who came to meet you... Who told you these things... And they said... You know... He wore a garment of hair... With a belt of leather... And he said...
 You can kind of hear the groan... It is Elijah... The Tishbite... He has a sinking feeling... He knows that his days... Are numbered... And when we come near the grave...

Knowing that we have scorned God... And we've utterly rejected him... That we've been propping ourselves... Back up on our beds... For a few more years... We hear... The prophecy that... Ahaziah's father heard... I will utterly burn you up... That's what we worry about... Isn't it? But when we repent... We hear... Because he's humbled himself... Before me... I will not bring disaster... In these days... God is gracious...

[19 : 35] And he proves it in this... That declarations of judgment... Are opportunities for repentance... Take yours... If you haven't already... When you come near the grave... And you hear...

I will burn you up... Which is in the Bible... Take that opportunity... Of repentance... And come to the one... Who gave you life...

In whose world... You live... Even Ahab... Lowed himself to the dust... When he heard of God's judgment...

But... His son Ahaziah... Doesn't repent... Does he? Instead he props himself up... From his bed... And he sends out spears... Captains and their companies... To seize God's profit... So we'll move on to that now...

God is gracious... That's still the point... But I want us to... To see that... There are two ways... You know... You can avoid him...

[20 : 29] Altogether... Until the last day... Or you can lower yourself... And come to him... And that's what happens here... One commentator has lamented... This passage...

In fact many have... They said... It's the inhumanity... Of destruction... Of innocent captains... And fifties... But basically... How can God do this? Verses 9 to 10...

Then the king said... To the captain of 50... Man with his 50... He went up to Elijah... Who was sitting on top of a hill... And said to him... O man of God... The king says... Come down... But Elijah answered...

The captain of 50... If I am a man of God... Let fire come down from heaven... And consume you... And your 50... We may think... That is... A pretty wild overreaction...

I think... A lot of the time... We like to... See this as a kind of... An innocent man... With quite a polite request... It sounds quite nice... Doesn't it in English? Don't worry...

[21 : 25] I'm not going to tell you... Oh it's much ruder... In the Hebrew... I'm just saying... It sounds... It sounds quite nice... It sounds quite nice... O man of God... The king says... Come down...

But these men were... Soldiers... Following orders... Weren't they? We often hear... Just following orders... But... But... Their orders were to capture... The prophet of God... And intimidate him with weapons...

And I... And I... I'm certain... That the reason for this... Is because... They're attempting to get him... To reverse the prophecy... Or say... No that's not going to happen... Well the reason I know this... Is because... Because it's... Already happened before... To another prophet... And Micaiah... In the past... In a couple of chapters back... They tried to get him... To change his story...

And... Why are they there? Ahaziah has already... Received the prophecy... So why... Why... Why are they bothering...

[22 : 19] Going and chasing down the guy... You know... If you don't think it's going to come true... Just ignore it... If he doesn't believe it... Just sit and wait... Or send the messengers back... To who you were trying to... In the first place... Go to Beelzebub...

But he doesn't... He sends... Messengers... To Beelzebub... But he doesn't do that... For the God of Israel... Does he? He sends soldiers... 51 soldiers...

To go and capture one man... What he's saying is... He knows the power of God... Or he wouldn't be bothering... But he doesn't like it... So...

He sends these soldiers... To the prophet of the true God... To the God of Israel... Ahaziah wants good news... His father Ahab... Had tried the same trick... With Micaiah... He sent the messengers... To tell him... You better say something good... Because everyone else has...

Fall in line... And weapons are quite persuasive... To fall in line aren't they... So... We also know that these captains... Have a choice as well... Before we feel too bad for them... They have a choice...

[23 : 14] Of how they approach the prophet... And this is important... Each captain actually... Says something different to Elijah... If you notice that... The first captain says this... The king says... Come down... The second... Captain... After they are burned... Knowing what's happened... Hardens his resolve... He says... Verse 12... O man of God... This is the king's order... Come down... Quickly... Get down here this instant... This captain is saying... The king is trying to treat Elijah... Like a naughty schoolboy... But the question is... Is here... Who hasn't learned that... A lesson from this... The king... Doesn't kneel... Does he? He doesn't come down... You may think... Yes he's ill... Remember in the New Testament... People are carried to Jesus... People who can't move at all... Are carried to Christ... Are they?

[24 : 12] But this guy won't suffer... To be carried to Elijah... Instead he treats him with contempt... And he sends him to be seized... At the tip of a spear... Ahaziah doesn't care about God... He doesn't fear him... His captains don't fear God... Elijah responds... Therefore with the fire... Of Mount Carmel... A story... Ahaziah would have known well... Where... Elijah... Sent down fire... Upon this sacrifice... Or God sent down fire... After Elijah's prayer... Upon this sacrifice... At the top of a mountain... To prove that God is true and real... And that Baaz is false... That's already happened... Just a few years back... And yet... Israel needs teaching here again... The fire says... That God's word... Cannot be seized... Or shaped by man... You can't shape... The fire with your hand... When it's raining down on you... [25 : 08] Can you? You can't mould it... He won't... He won't... Come down... At the demand... Of armed men... His profit... Cannot be handled... His word... That he speaks... Can't be changed... It can't be moulded... And squashed... Into the shape... That we want it to be... It can't be pressed... Into our preferred pattern... How many of us... By the way... If we had our way... Before you're thinking... You know... Those people out there... They don't want to do that... But I love God's word... How many of us... Would have removed passages... Like this from the Bible... Because they cause offence... We are just like... Aphaziah... Are we... In that... Who would seek... To remove the prophecy... From the mouth of Elijah... Concerning his own death... It should shame us... That the man... Who had most reason... To complain about the deaths... Of these captains and soldiers... Probably one who knew them personally... Is the third captain... Isn't he? If there's any single person... Who should have compassion... [26 : 05] As we should... It is the third captain... As he comes... In verse 13... Again... The king sent... The captain of a third fifty... With his fifty... But he does not judge God... He doesn't demand... That the prophet of God... Comes down... He doesn't demand... Justice or vengeance... For the lives of those... Who have been killed... But he comes on his knees... And the third captain of fifty... Went up... See he goes... He goes 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 God... Be precious in your sight... Behold... Fire from heaven... Consumes... The two former captains... Of fifties... With their fifties... But... Now let my life... Be precious in your sight... That's what he asks for... [27 : 00] Let my life... Be precious in your sight... I know that that happened... I understand... And I submit to you... And to the Lord... I'm not going to kill you... I'm not going to intimidate you... I'm just going to bring you to the king... This is turning the army... Against the king... By the way... That's what's happening here... And God does this... By showing that he is a consuming fire... And yet... Also that he is merciful... And gracious... It's the wonder of grace... We, I think... Have a fine habit... Of approaching God's word... With our weapons out... We like to stand in judgment... Over it, don't we? We want to cut out... Every page of the defense... But there are only... Two sorts of interactions... We can have with the word of God... Either we demand... That it comes down to us... At the point of a spear... So we can interrogate it... Or we humble ourselves... To the dust... Before God himself...

[27 : 57] As he speaks to us... Knowing he is holy... In this passage... We see that the word of God... Can't be shaped... And seized by us... El-Ziah's name...

By the way... Means God seizes... So there's a... He seeks to seize... The prophet... But in the end... God seizes him... Down to the grave... The wonder of grace...

Is that our God... The true God... The God of Israel... Is a consuming fire... Yet our God... Did come down... In the New Testament... There is grace... He poured upon grace... It's not just...

That... You know... Elijah's not wrong... To stand on his rights here... And say... I am the prophet of God... And you should not... Try to kill me... But in the Garden of Gethsemane...

We'll finish here... Jesus was surrounded by enemies... With weapons drawn... And he did not... Pull that fire upon him... He came down...

[28 : 53] From his holy hill... And suffered to be seized... And beaten and mocked... And crucified... Elijah wasn't wrong... To stand his ground...

Christ could also have done so... But in him... The grace of God... The God of grace... Offers grace upon grace...

In him the grace of God... Is shown... Isn't it? We see how much... The grace of God... Goes above and beyond... That he is gracious here... But he is more gracious...

Even in Christ... On the day of Jesus' death... The fire of God's judgment... Didn't fall upon the captains... The soldiers... The centurion... Did it? It fell upon our captain...

The Lord Jesus Christ... God is a God of grace... There is a God... In Israel... And he is a gracious God... Let us pray...

[29 : 47]