

2 Kings Ch1v1-17 - God's Word and Our Response

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[0 : 00] Good morning everybody.

If you could open your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 22, the last chapter of 1 Kings. 1 Kings and verse 51.

This is on page 366 of the Red Church Bible. 366. So it's 1 Kings chapter 22 and verse 51.

And while you're turning there, just a little bit of context. 1 and 2 Kings were actually originally one full book. They were split in two. At some point, for ease of access.

But, yeah, it's a full narrative. And we're diving right into the middle of it today. And so just to set the context in that. After leading the Israelites out of slavery.

[1 : 12] God has given his people the land of Canaan. But, after about 300 years, the kingdom is split in two, sadly.

We have Judah to the south. We have Israel to the north. Which is the setting of our text today. And the book, in its entirety, basically tells us about the kings, obviously, of these two kingdoms.

And the real thing about it is whether these kings are going to listen to and accept God's word. Or are they going to reject it?

That's the test, basically, for each king. So, I think it's a very relevant word for us today. Because, as we live in a liberal society, which has largely brushed aside God's word as irrelevant and outdated, this passage is very relevant to us.

Because we're going to hear about a king and his attitude towards God's word, too. And what we're going to do is we're going to read the passage piece by piece today.

[2 : 24] Rather than reading the whole thing at the start, we're going to read it bit by bit to kind of build attention a little bit. Nobody likes spoilers. If you meet me on the way into Omniplex and Manpoint.

And don't tell me the storyline of the film, if you want to be my friend afterwards. So, yeah, we're going to build attention. And if you do know the story, no spoilers for the person beside you.

But, yeah, let's pray. Let's commit this time to the Lord now. Holy Spirit, we come needy.

When we come asking you for your help. To see the wonderful things that you have to say to us today through your word.

And it's not all easy to take. So give us grace to love your word and not to run from it. Amen. Well, let's start at 1 Kings 22, verse 51.

[3 : 36] And we're going to continue then into the next book, 2 Kings, and read most of the first chapter. So, verse 51. Ahaziah, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in Samaria in the 17th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

And he reigned over Israel for two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin.

He served and worshipped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done. Skip over the page.

After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. We'll pause there.

Can you imagine how the headlines would have read in those days? Probably pretty similar to those in Ukraine at the start of last year. Breaking news.

[4 : 47] Moab is gathering troops along the border. Israel, prepare for war. And we can imagine the nation in a state of panic as fathers and sons dust down their weapons for battle.

Women and children filled with fear at the prospect of what might happen to their loved ones. In times of peril, what the people of God need is a ruler who will bring them a word from God of security and of hope.

But what did they find? Let's read verse 2. Now Ahaziah, the king, had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself.

So he sent messengers saying to them, Go and consult Baal-Zibbub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.

Their king has taken a rather embarrassing tumble. And rather than worrying about the impending war in his nation, he's asking a false god if he's going to get better soon.

[6 : 02] It really is that pathetic. The real crisis for Israel in this story is not that their king has an injury. It's not even that their enemies have declared war.

The real crisis is that their leader, instead of seeking a word of hope from God for his people, is seeking a word of affirmation from a false god for himself.

Things are not good in Israel. And by the way, Ahaziah should have known what his job was as the king of God's people.

God had given him a list of instructions. You can look at those in Deuteronomy chapter 27. I'm just going to summarize them here. A, don't make any idols out of sex, money, or power. And B, write out God's word.

Read it every day. Do it every day. Don't turn away from God's word. That was his job as king. He was supposed to show the rest of the nation how to listen to and apply God's word.

[7 : 04] Now, obviously, we're not getting those vibes from Ahaziah here. In fact, Ahaziah kept pushing out God's word and looking for another word he wanted to hear.

A word that affirmed what he said was right. And now, before we start saying, oh, how foolish Ahaziah, did you not read all the instructions?

We need to realize that we're just like him. We keep pushing out God's word and looking for another word that we want to hear. A word that affirms what we say is right over and above what God says is right.

We consistently don't believe that God's word really does give us life. We think something else is going to give us something better.

And that's a big problem for Ahaziah and for you and for me because this is what the Bible calls idolatry. Which is when we look to something or someone else for our ultimate security, love and joy apart from God.

[8 : 17] And the result of idolatry is plain obvious. Spend your lifetime choosing other things over God. And when this life ends, God will simply give you what you've always wanted in this life for eternity.

Life apart from him. Away from his presence. A reality that the Bible calls hell. So, from the outset, let's just establish this.

We, like Ahaziah, are in ultimate danger. Because of our idolatry. Because we don't listen to God's word. What hope is there for us?

Well, as this story unfolds, we're going to see how Ahaziah responds to God's word. And ultimately, the refuge that we can find in God's final word.

His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So, first of all, God speaks his word in mercy. Let's read on the story. Verse 3.

[9 : 28] But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite. Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them.

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zibbub, the god of Ekron? Therefore, this is what the Lord says. Therefore, this is what the Lord says. You will not leave the bed you are lying on.

You will certainly die. So, Elijah went. And when the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, Why have you come back?

A man came to meet us, they replied. And he said to us, Go back to the king who sent you and tell him. This is what the Lord says. Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-Zibbub, the god of Ekron?

Therefore, you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die. Wow. God chooses to intervene.

[10 : 34] And he does it through his prophet, Elijah, the man at that time who God chose to carry his word to the people. And as Elijah stops the king's messengers in their tracks on the way to Baal, what is crystal clear is that God will not tolerate Ahaziah's idolatry.

And let's be clear, this is not God overreaching here or meddling in his personal affairs. It's God being merciful to Ahaziah.

God knew that Baal-Zibbub was nothing more than a statue of gold and no more able to speak words of truth and comfort than a brick wall. So God graciously intervenes.

He gives Ahaziah one last chance to turn to his life-giving words. We could say God is mercifully intolerant of our idolatry.

Listen closely to the way God asks the question of Ahaziah. This is repeated three times, so we've got to listen up to this. Verse 3. Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-Zibbub?

[11 : 46] The answer is obvious. Yes! Yes, Ahaziah does have a God in Israel who has fought all their battles and rescued them from slavery.

It's as foolish as if my son, when feeling hungry, were to walk out the front door and start rummaging through the bin for something good to eat.

I would walk out the door and look at him and ask, is it because you don't have a dad who loves you and who has a fridge full of food that you've chosen to look in the bin for something to eat?

How ridiculous would that be? You'd never do that. Or, what if there was a world-renowned heart surgeon with her clinic on your very street?

Just imagine that for a second. And one morning you wake up with an unusual heart tremor. So you immediately get up to get some help, but you walk straight past the heart clinic and into your hairdresser to ask her advice on how to fix the problem.

[12 : 54] If your heart surgeon found out, she would rightly ask, is it because you don't have a world-renowned heart surgeon on your street that you're going to your hairdresser to get advice on that heart problem?

How ridiculous would that be? We would never do that, right? And yes, we do this all the time when it comes to God's Word.

We know God's words are always true, saving us and giving us life everlasting, but we routinely don't want to hear it. Why?

Because these words are also lovingly convicting. God knows that sin destroys our joy in Him.

The writer of Hebrews captures it like this. You can look at it on the board. For the Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

[13 : 55] It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. You see, Ahaziah is just showing us what's really going on in our own hearts.

We want it our way, and we don't want anyone to get in our way. And if God's Word is going to do that, if it's going to get in our way, then we're going to turn instead to a podcast or a book or a friend who's going to tell us exactly what we want to hear, a word that will affirm what we say is true and good.

And just like he asked Ahaziah, God is asking you and he's asking me today, is it because you don't have a God who speaks life-giving words that you are turning to an empty word to affirm what you say is true?

God didn't allow Ahaziah to continue his idolatry and peace. He graciously interrupted it. There is love in his anger against our sin.

And as God invites Ahaziah to return to the true security and hope of his Word over empty promises, so he invites us. But let's keep going in this story.

[15 : 28] How is Ahaziah going to respond to God's warning? Read from verse 7. The king asked them, What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?

They replied, He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt round his waist. The king said, That was Elijah the Tishbite.

Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of 50 men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, Man of God, the king says, Come down.

Elijah answered the captain, If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men. At this, the king sent to Elijah another captain with his 50 men.

[16 : 38] The captain said to him, Man of God, this is what the king says, Come down at once. If I am a man of God, Elijah replied, May fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his 50 men. Well, after Isaiah figures out the identity of this speaker of God's word, there wasn't really any debate necessary.

There's only one thing on his mind. Destroy him. Destroy Elijah. And with Elijah, God's word. So what does Isaiah do?

Well, he summons the troops. He sends him off to bring Elijah back and very soon Elijah will be saying his last words. But, God intervenes.

And two sets of troops are consumed by fire. And this is a shocking judgment. It jars us.

[17 : 54] And we do struggle to understand why. Maybe it seems like an overreaction. Why did God have to do it this way?

And you know, it's good that we ask those questions of the text. Not saying we're going to completely understand it. But there are some things we can understand about why God may have chosen this course of action.

And I think two main things that stand out are this. A. God's word will always endure. Elijah was about to be killed. And God had to protect his word from being destroyed.

Therefore, this intervention was necessary. He was protecting his servant and his word. And that should encourage us. God's word cannot be silenced.

Kings and governments may try to eradicate it. Society may write laws to push it out. And they may see temporary success, but they can never truly silence God's word.

[19 : 05] In fact, Jesus promised us in Matthew chapter 24 verse 14. He said, this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

nations. And then the end will come. We can bank our lives in that happening. So, A, God's word will always endure.

Maybe another reason why God took this course of action would be this. God's word is always supreme. It's no coincidence that God responds with fire to Ahaziah's contempt.

Baalzebub was actually known as the god of fire to the people who worshipped him at that time. So, God is effectively saying, I'll show you fire.

This is really a statement from God to Ahaziah and the whole nation. He makes a mockery out of Baal. He shows Baal to be completely false.

[20 : 15] And in doing this, the whole of Israel would know that God is the true God. And it's true in our lives also that every word contradicting God's word will ultimately fail us.

Whether it's the empty promises of satisfaction from sinful indulgence, the empty promises of fulfillment from a romantic relationship, the empty promises of happiness from having more and more followers, likes, gadgets, stuff, all these words will ultimately fail us and leave us empty in the end.

And they never come through on their promises. But not with God's word. Everything God promises you in his word is true and you can bank your life on it.

When he promises freedom from sin, deep-rooted joy in the midst of pain, an inheritance forever in heaven, it's all real and true and it completely surpasses all the other empty words we look to for life.

We can bank our lives on it. So first, God speaks his word in mercy. Second, he protects his word eternally.

[21 : 52] And third, God fulfills his word unfailingly. And we're reaching the climax of the story. It's getting tense.

Ahaziah has had every opportunity to repent. What now? He's throwing all the toys out of the pram. He's making every effort possible to try and destroy God's word and we can see it's coming up embarrassingly short.

Will he repent? Well, it doesn't look like it. Look in verse 13. So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men.

This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. Man of God, he begged, please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants.

See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now, have respect for my life.

[23 : 05] The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, go down with him, do not be afraid of him. So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

He told the king, this is what the Lord says. Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal Zibbub, the god of Ekron?

Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die. And so he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

The application is quite simple, isn't it? God fulfills his word unfailingly. What he says will happen, will happen.

Ahaziah died because God said he would. No matter how hard Ahaziah fought to destroy God's word, God could not be stopped from fulfilling all of his holy purposes.

[24 : 20] God had seen how Ahaziah, leader of God's people, lived his whole life pushing out God's word, looking for another word he wanted to hear, a word that affirmed what he said was right.

His reign only lasted two years. He was judged for his sin. But where does this all leave us? Because we've already established that we have the very same heart tendency as Ahaziah. If Ahaziah met that end, same in store for us.

Well, he lived in a time before Jesus and we might say he had God's word in an earlier form. Hebrews says it well, it's on the board.

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he also made the universe.

[25 : 34] The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Jesus is God's ultimate word. Everything God wanted to say, he said it through Jesus. And think about Jesus' life on earth.

In John 14, he says, I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. You see, Jesus lived the perfect life of obedience to God's word that we have all failed to live.

And yet, as he suffered in agony on the cross, what did he cry out? He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, how could a person who lived a perfect life of obedience to God's word, find himself in a position where he separated from God's love?

Well, the answer is that as Jesus hung there, he was taking your place and mine. We deserved to be there for our rejection of God's word and turning to another word that we wanted to hear.

[27 : 01] So we should get what we wanted, separation from God forever. But Jesus took the fire of God's judgment that we deserved.

He was separated from the Father so that we could come close forever. And that is the best news that we ever hear.

so what should our response be to this Jesus, God's final word?

Well, I think it should be something like that of the captains, the third captain, I mean. Notice how different his approach is to God's word as it was spoken through Elijah.

Look back at verse 13. Verse 13. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah.

[28 : 04] Man of God, he begged, please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants. See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men, but now have respect for my life.

This captain falls on his knees. He begs for mercy. He pleads for a salvation that he knows his king and people don't deserve. And so likewise, we come on our knees before God's final word, Jesus Christ.

We look to him for mercy. We look to the cross in faith and believe that Jesus really did take all our sin on himself there.

we look to the empty tomb in faith and we see our risen Savior who has swallowed up our death forever.

We humble ourselves before him as our king and we present our lives as living sacrifices to him in thankfulness. God's God's final word is asking you and I and every other person on this planet is this.

[29 : 25] Will you accept Jesus, God's final word or will you reject him? And if you're not yet a follower of Christ, let me just say there's no more important decision that you can ever make.

And don't say, oh, I don't need to think about that right now. I've got time in my life to make that decision at a later point. You don't even know that you have tomorrow.

How foolish to ignore the warning of God's judgment like Ahaziah did. Accepting or rejecting Jesus is the difference between eternal life with God or eternal separation from him.

if we reject Christ, God will simply give us what we've chosen in this life for eternity. Hear the warning.

But if you do accept God's final word, Jesus, trusting in him for your salvation, you are transferred from death to life.

[30 : 40] And if that is you today, and if you have run into the refuge that is Christ, you don't need to fear losing him. God is holding onto you despite your continued struggle with sin.

As Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy, if we are faithless, he is faithful. And how can God do this? Well, he can do it because our sin has been paid for by Christ.

Christ. So, that can no longer separate us from God. We don't have to fear that we might lose him when we fail. Now, of course, it is foolish of us to run to the empty promises of other words over God's word.

And we do this, even as followers of Christ, we are doing this daily. And whenever we do it, we simply lose out on true joy, security, and hope.

It is like rummaging through a bin for something good to eat, while standing beside an open fridge full of fresh food. You see, once we become children of God, the fight to stay in God's word is the fight for joy.

[31 : 59] joy. We don't get lasting joy anywhere else. The empty promises of our idols will always let us down.

But what can comfort us or fill us with hope like God's unshakable promises in his word? Nothing can.

I want to finish with some verses from Psalm 119. They're going to come up on the board here. We could probably say that the writer of this psalm was the opposite of King Ahaziah because he understood the superior treasures of God's word.

He had developed an insatiable appetite for them. And he shows us how we can develop these spiritual taste buds too by meditating on God's word and asking God for his help and his grace to love his word.

I've just picked out four verses. Verse 97. Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long.

[33 : 17] How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Your statutes are my heritage forever. They are the joy of my heart. It seems that you and I are far too easily pleased with rummaging through the bin looking for scraps of empty promises that will never satisfy.

When all the while, a fully stocked fridge packed with delicious promises that you can bank your life on stands open right beside you.

The choice is yours. Scraps or a feast. Empty words are God's life-giving word.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, we turn to you now.

[34 : 46] we can't suddenly just want God's word more than the empty promises of other things. It's not in us. We need a heart change.

We need an appetite change so that we find your words and your promises more delightful and true and satisfying than any other lesser words.

give us grace today and tomorrow each day we live to choose Jesus and find our ultimate joy in him and for his glory we pray.

Amen. Amen. We are going to sing a song.