

# To Be Taken Seriously

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm sure that most of us here, not necessarily all of us, but most of us here are fairly familiar with the Gospels in the New Testament, those extraordinary documents that recount the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They are remarkable in a whole lot of ways. We're going to pick up some of the ways in which they're remarkable over the next few minutes and also tomorrow.

But it is always a shame when you become so used to something that you don't notice how remarkable it is. That's almost unavoidable, but every now and again you just sort of take stock and say this is utterly remarkable.

It's not only that these accounts, we call them the Gospels, of course, it's not only that the Gospels tell a remarkable story, they certainly do that, but as documents they are remarkable, they are unique.

There's nothing like them really in world literature. I'll expand on that in a little while, I think.

[ 1 : 12 ] But I wonder what you make as you read the Gospel accounts of the accounts that you find there of the miracles performed by Jesus.

I mean, they're everywhere, aren't they? Not counting the remarkable events associated with the birth of Jesus, put those to one side for a moment, and put to one side the events surrounding the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

On one count that I looked up, I didn't do the count, but I found somebody who did. It's always helpful to find people like that, isn't it? There are 36 different occasions recorded when Jesus, with a word or with a touch, or in some other remarkable way, healed people, cast out demons, controlled the forces of nature, even raised dead people back to life.

And you'll probably be familiar with the words in John's Gospel, where he assures us that there were many more such episodes which are not written in this book, his book.

He says if they were, the world wouldn't be big enough to fill them all. Well, perhaps that was a little bit of an exaggeration, but nonetheless, there were so many episodes like that.

[ 2 : 34 ] And we read the stories, and so we witness them through those who tell us about them. And the question I want to reflect on for a moment with you is, what impact should these stories have on us?

As you read of this incident, this incident, this incident in Jesus' life. At a very basic level, of course, the stories challenge the modern unbeliever who imagines that science can explain everything.

Tell you what, science is going to have some trouble explaining some of these things that you read in the Gospels. You see, the Gospels insist that Jesus Christ cannot be contained in such a narrow view of reality.

The reactions of those who were there show a whole lot more insight than today's sceptics. They said things like, what sort of man is this?

That even the wind and the sea obey him. We read that when the crowd saw it, another incident, they were afraid, and they glorified God.

[ 3 : 44 ] Or they said, never was anything like this seen in Israel. Another one said, truly you are the Son of God. And then in another place, they glorified the God of Israel.

Those were some of the reactions that you see as you read these accounts. We might reasonably add that many of Jesus' miracles displayed his kindness in a most remarkable and powerful way. His compassion. The stories are massive displays of his goodness. You remember how again and again and again those who sought his mercy found it.

Often in the most remarkable ways. Well, that's a good start, I think. But the miracles of Jesus are even more important. Consider these devastating words concerning two of the towns which had

witnessed those mighty works of Jesus.

I'm reading from Matthew 11. You needn't look it up, but just listen. You'll be familiar with the words, I think. Woe to you. Woe to you. Woe to you. Jesus is speaking. Woe to you. Chorazin.

[ 5 : 04 ] Woe to you, Bethsaida. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. It's another wow moment, isn't it?

Golly. Tyre and Sidon, they were pagan cities up to the north of Israel. They were famous.

You read references to them in the Old Testament. You read great poems about them in the Old Testament, actually. They were famous for their tyrannical arrogance, their wealth, their cruelty. They were tough places. They were pagan places. And Jesus claimed, again, perhaps with a little bit of hyperbole, he was given to hyperbole from time to time, that if those cities had witnessed the mighty works that had taken place in Chorazin and Bethsaida, both Israelite cities, of course, then those notorious pagans would have been brought to their knees in repentance.

[ 6 : 21 ] But that hadn't happened in Chorazin and Bethsaida, so woe to you. But that raises a question, doesn't it? What is it about the miracles of Jesus that ought to have led those who witnessed them to repentance?

Now, wonder, get that, understand that. Of course, if you saw what Jesus did, the wind and the waves obeyed him, you just, jaw drops and you say, who is this man?

Wonder, yes. Amazement, certainly. But why would the pagans of Tyre and Sidon have repented? What's the connection between the miracles, if only you saw them, if you'd been there, that you ought to have repented?

Why should the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida have repented? And the answer is, quite simple, that the miracles were signs.

And the importance of a sign is not the sign itself, but what it signifies, what it points to. And the miracles of Jesus were signs pointing to God's kingdom.

[ 7 : 39 ] God's kingdom where the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the dumb will sing for joy. Jesus, you see, in those things we call the miracles, was demonstrating his power and authority as God's king.

That's what he was doing. And the signs accompanied his message, which was, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The kingdom of heaven is the long-promised reality of God's good and righteous reign as king over all things. And God's good and righteous reign involves judgment.

Because evil will be overthrown. All evil will be overthrown. And righteousness and peace will be established. And repentance is the radical change that is demanded by the coming of God's king. God's king is coming, it means turning away from all evil. It means submitting to God's king. And because Jesus' miracles are signs of the kingdom, they demand repentance, not just awe and wonder, but repentance.

[ 9 : 01 ] Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now, something similar happened much earlier in the history of the Israelite people.

You've been, in many of you, most of you, I think, in your groups have been reading through two kings and you've been reading the story of Elisha and you've been seeing a lot more of the story of Elisha than we're going to manage to see this weekend because I'm so slow in the way in which I work through these stories.

You may have picked that up. But the miracle stories in the New Testament gospels have a kind of background. If you think of the gospel stories, they're kind of, what's remarkable about them, when I said there's nothing like this in world literature, if you try and describe what they're like, they're little incident after incident after incident.

Of course, there's much more to the gospels than this. But you move from one incident to another, don't you? And each one has its point. And many of the incidents are miraculous.

Well, where do you find anything like that in the Old Testament? And the thing that's closest to it is the story of Elisha, which again, is you have incident after incident after incident and a whole lot of them are miraculous.

[ 10 : 22 ] And it seems to me that this is again the New Testament writers, to a certain extent, I think they've modelled their accounts of the life of Jesus on the Old Testament story of Elisha.

Again, another indication of what we saw earlier on, there are connections between the story of Elisha and the story of Jesus and we should move between them both. Now, certainly the stories in the New Testament gospels surpass the accounts of the prophet Elisha and his mighty works in two kings.

you might, in the New Testament, find yourself saying something greater than Elisha is here. Well, certainly that's true but there is a striking similarity. So we're going to go and pick up Elisha's story where we left off last time in 2 Kings chapter 2 and the passage that was just read to us a few moments ago.

You remember what happened? Elisha had crossed the Jordan River in a remarkable kind of reenactment of Joshua's crossing the river before coming back as he was travelling from east to west.

I think I've got it right this time. Joshua probably did that, quite possibly did that, very close to the spot where Jesus would be baptised by John some centuries later.

[11:42] And although the New Testament gospels I don't think at any point make an explicit reference to this, I'm pretty sure if you'd been there and you knew your Old Testament and as you read the Gospels if you know your Old Testament when you see Jesus being baptised you're reminded of this moment.

You might be reminded of some other moments as well but you're reminded of this moment where Elisha came into the land. And Elisha proceeded to retrace the steps of the Israelites in Joshua's day as they were taking possession of the land that God had promised their forefather Abraham. So he came to Jericho in chapter 2 verse 18 and like them shortly he will move on to the vicinity of Bethel. And in this study we are really going to focus on what happened in those two cities in Jericho and Bethel where two very remarkable things happened.

We could call them miracles. I think that would be the kind of category but they were more than miracles they were signs. They were signs of Elisha's message. What was Elisha's message? Well I think it's summed up in his name My God saves. So if you look at your notes what we're going to see is Jericho a troubled city that sought and received help.

[13:04] And then we're going to move on to Bethel a rebellious city that mocked God's prophet and received its due. And then very briefly at the end we'll move on to Mount Carmel and Samaria.

And the question we're asking all the way through is what do we make of these stories? Before you can answer that question you've got to actually look at the stories and hear the stories well and carefully and then say what do we make of these?

You'll be aware in the second of those stories you listened to it a moment ago. I wonder how many of you are sitting there saying surely he's not going to talk about that one. It's a pretty horrible story isn't it coming up when we get to Bethel don't glance ahead if you weren't listening before too bad you don't know what I'm talking about you will shortly.

When you're teaching the Bible and when you're reading the Bible it's really important that when you see something I don't want to deal with that when you see that bit that you don't want to deal with it's really important that you deal with it.

It's very important that we don't skip over parts of the Bible that are a bit frightening and a bit scary.

This one's a bit frightening and a bit scary. I was tempted to skip over it and then I thought I better not because David will come and chip me later on and tell me I shouldn't have.

[14:16] So I won't. First of all however we come to Jericho that's not too bad that one we can cope with the Jericho story I think. Jericho was a city with quite a story.

Here's a clue in reading the Old Testament there are lots of little skills you can develop and one of the things that I've always found very very helpful is you can't do it all the time because it's too time consuming but when you come across a place name first of all I said earlier look it up on an atlas and see where it is.

So you follow where you're moving what's close to what what direction are people moving and get an idea of the geography of a place where the place is but the other thing is that not all but very very many Bible places have a big story behind them and there are associations with the place many places in the Bible are like is that noise annoying people?

Yeah it's annoying people can you stop it? If we have problems I can shout but okay they're working on it we'll concentrate here it's my fault that might okay thank you guys thank you let them do their thing so I'm saying that many place names in the Bible have associations that you need to know your Bible really really well to pick them up and the way to get it for those of us who are you know

still working at knowing the Bible really really well is a Bible dictionary the most valuable reference book for reading and studying the Bible is a good Bible dictionary like the new Bible dictionary I think that's probably still the best one around it's been around for a long long time and a Bible dictionary is really a Bible encyclopedia they're not really dictionaries they're encyclopedias and you can look up and you if you looked up

Jericho there would be an article not a very long one but it would take you through the whole Bible history of Jericho what's happened in Jericho and so when you come to Jericho you say what's associated with this town it's a bit like New York if you think of New York all sorts of associations aren't there you think of Paris all sorts of associations London associations Newcastle well yeah associations cities have a history and a feel what do you think of when you hear of Jericho what's the thing that the biggest thing that comes to mind I think you'll all remember this what is it the walls of Jericho that came down in Joshua's day that was the very beginning of the entry into the land as they were taking the land the walls of Jericho came down but you mightn't remember what happened after the walls of Jericho came down very important that Joshua said because this was the big sign of God's judgment on the inhabitants of the land they were terrible and this was the beginning of the judgment of the peoples of the land the walls of Jericho fell down and Joshua said this is Joshua 6 verse 26 for those who are taking notes cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city of Jericho so it was flattened and here's the word cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds the city of Jericho and that was remembered and for centuries

[17:50] Jericho lay in ruins and no one dared to rebuild it because it was there and it was meant to remain like that as a sign of what God did both to save his people and in judgment on the wickedness of the people of the land you mightn't be all that surprised to hear that it was in King Ahab's day that a man named Hiel H-I-E-L he's not very famous nor should he be but he was allowed by King Ahab to defy Joshua's word and rebuild the city you'll read about it in 1 Kings 16 and it was a mark of King Ahab's defiant disobedience and flagrant unfaithfulness that he allowed the city of Jericho to be rebuilt and it was by this man Hiel well now it has been rebuilt it's been rebuilt for some time and Elisha was staying in the city of Jericho with all of its associations the city that had been rebuilt in disobedience and unfaithfulness it was if Joshua's word is to be believed and I believe it is it was a city under a curse that was it was a city under God's judgment for the disobedience and unfaithfulness that had allowed it to be rebuilt what do you think will happen when Elisha my God saves spend some time in Jericho verse 19 now the men of the city said to Elisha behold the situation of this city is pleasant the word is good as my Lord sees but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful perhaps the men of the city had been influenced by the followers of Elijah and Elisha the sons of the prophets remember there was this group in Jericho that lived there they were faithful they were disciples of Elijah and Elisha and they lived in the city perhaps they'd influenced the city and they had been the first of course to receive and acknowledge

Elisha in his new role and the men of the city now approached Elisha with respect and with a problem Jericho well the city looked pleasant enough looked nice looked good the houses were fine the city's defences were strong and so it seemed but appearances can be deceptive the city had a serious problem the water supply was poisonous with tragic consequences I think the translation's probably not quite right there the language is a bit difficult but the word unfruitful probably actually means causes miscarriages so there was some poison in the water something in the water that was causing that kind of tragedy repeatedly in the town Jericho was suffering the words of the men suggest that they're aware of God's promises you see back in Exodus again for note takers Exodus 23 verse 26

God had promised that in the promised land none shall miscarry but the land of which was supposed to have flowed with milk and honey now had water that caused miscarriages at least that was the situation in Jericho perhaps the men of the city understood that their troubles were related to the curse that Joshua had spoken centuries earlier and the humility and the respect with which they brought this problem to Elisha indicates the very high regard in which they must have held the man of God on whom the spirit of Elijah now rested what did they expect him to do though well Elisha responded to them in verse 20 bring me a new bowl and put salt in it and that's a rather strange thing to say don't you think you can sort of imagine the people saying really Elisha a bowl with some salt look our problem is a poisonous water supply for the whole city how do you think a bowl of salt is going to help well importantly these instructions came from the mouth of God's

prophet and these words strange as they sounded are going to determine the future of this city the immediate and unquestioning obedience of the people to the prophets odd instructions underlines their humble trust with which they had approached

Elisha you see verse 20 again so they brought it to him they didn't actually argue they did as they were told and in the city of Jericho symbol if you like of King Ahab's disobedience and unfaithfulness we're now seeing something new humble obedience to the words of God's prophet I read somewhere I haven't been on one of those tours to Israel some of you may have and maybe you can confirm or deny this but I understand that there is a spring near Jericho to this day that is believed to be many of the sites in Israel that are believed to be are probably not what they're believed to be but this one is believed to be the source of the city's water for centuries it's known today as Elisha's spring and it may be the very spot where we read in verse 21

Elisha went to the spring of water and threw salt in it now Elisha's action by itself a little bit of salt thrown into the gushing water wouldn't have any significant effect but the action was accompanied by an astonishing word Elisha said verse 21 thus says the Lord I have healed this water from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it this is the first time that we hear from Elisha's mouth those magnificent powerful words thus says the Lord a little bit more literally it should be translated wherever it comes up I think thus the Lord has said see Elisha like Elijah before him and the prophets that preceded and the prophets that will follow them both they had the task of delivering a message that

[ 24 : 53 ] God had spoken now Elisha my God saves delivered this saving word from God I have healed this water that's the kind of thing that God does people seek mercy and he shows mercy the outcome will be the restoration of the blessing promised in the book of Exodus from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from this water now we don't know how many of the citizens of Jericho heard those words that

Elisha uttered but what news this was and I suspect it spread very quickly indeed everywhere you went through Jericho that day have you heard what Elisha has said that God has said could it be true and verse 22 we read so the water has been healed to this day according to the word that Elisha spoke the impact of the word of the Lord spoken by Elisha on that day can still be seen the writer assures his first readers he says to them if you choose to visit Jericho you'll find that the water supply is still fresh and healthy you can still taste even today he says to his early readers even today you can taste the effect of God's saving mercy on the city of Jericho in the days of Elisha it was a sign it points to what God is like the kind of thing that

God does it was if you like a sign of God's kingdom well let's move on from Jericho verse 23 he went up from there to Bethel to Bethel he's still following in the steps of Joshua and the people as they came into the land he moved from Jericho to Bethel Bethel was another town you might remember from earlier in the chapter another town like Jericho where there was a group of the sons of the prophets living we saw that back in verse three of this chapter Bethel now again Bethel is a city with quite a story and I look up my Bible dictionary and I read the story to see what sort of associations would Bethel have had what's the history and a number of you will be able to think of various things that happened in Bethel the thing that I think is most relevant and a lot of them might be the most relevant I think is relatively recently about 70 years earlier King

Jeroboam now King Jeroboam was the first of the kings of the breakaway northern kingdom of Israel we were talking about last night King Jeroboam set up his idols in Bethel also in Dan but in Bethel they were alternatives to the house of the Lord down in Jerusalem he set them up King Jeroboam this sort of idolatrous alternative worship system it's in 1 Kings chapter 12 if you want to read about that and Bethel in a very strange chapter in 1 Kings chapter 13 Bethel had been visited by a prophet don't know his name he's called a man of God from Judah who pronounced God's judgment on the altar that Jeroboam had erected there however Jeroboam heard the word of that prophet but he didn't repent didn't change and over the years that followed the many years that followed the king after king after king persisted in this idolatry in

Israel that was trying to hold the people from going back to Jerusalem and in Elisha's day Bethel was still a centre of idolatrous worship a disturbing reminder of you know that phrase you come across as you're reading through this history the sins of Jeroboam with which he sinned and made Israel to sin that's referring to the idolatry that Jeroboam set up and king after king after king just kept up with that policy being idolatrous stopping the people from going to Jerusalem stopping the people from hearing the promises of God that they would hear if they went to Jerusalem and as we

watch Elisha approaching Bethel we're reminded of this terrible refrain that runs through the book of kings every single king in the northern kingdom persisted in that policy of Jeroboam's of keeping the people away from Jerusalem and Bethel was a key to that policy now interestingly for the present story I'll just throw you into all these sort of details you can be interested in them or not be interested in them do what you like with them but

[ 30 : 23 ] Bethel was the home of a man named Hiel what did Hiel do he rebuilt Jericho this was his home that's where he learnt the kind of attitude that would go about rebuilding Jericho when you knew what Joshua had said about Jericho no doubt Bethel was the kind of town that taught you to defy the word of the Lord well that was Bethel now apparently it seems from the way in which this story is going to unfold that the sons of the prophets in Bethel had rather less influence there than they had had in Jericho and as Elisha was on his way up to the town verse 23 we read that some my ESV says some small boys I usually like the ESV here I don't I don't think they were small boys I think they were young lads I think the NIV has youths and I think that's a more accurate rendering here these young lads came out of the city and jeered at him saying go up you bald head go up you bald head or something like that I don't know the tone once again they came out of the city to mock and to jeer at the prophet how different to Jericho yeah now who were they as I say they're probably not small boys but young lads possibly in their late teens the vocabulary would fit young people in their even early twenties we will see shortly that there was quite a crowd of them this wasn't two or three kids this was over fifty perhaps a hundred or more of them a mob of hoodlums really coming out to jeer and to mock at God's prophet and in their complete complete lack of respect they make a stark contrast to the men of Jericho just a little bit earlier try and picture the scene they're on the high ground and these louts big mob of them hurling their scornful mockery down at

Elisha as he was making his way up towards the city it's a rather nasty turn of events because since the beginning of this chapter when Elisha left Gilgal with Elijah do you remember on that momentous trek that began at the beginning of the chapter Elisha has really encountered nothing but supportive and encouraging responses the sons of the prophets are like that when he comes back even though they want to send out a search party there's no real friction there they respect him and so on but here he comes to Bethel and the contempt shown by these young thugs probably reflects the attitude towards a prophet of the lord that they had learnt in their town certainly they embodied behaviour that would actually characterise the people of Israel over many years again if you're interested in doing some homework and following up some references jot down this 2 Chronicles 36 16 when much later the writer will reflect on the history of Israel and say but they kept mocking the messengers of God despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the lord rose against his people until there was no remedy it's one of the reasons that I'm so fearful for our society today

I mean that's not a bad description is it of Australia today I know you've got to translate it a little bit but listen listen to this and see whether this fits the Australia you know but they kept mocking the messengers of God despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the lord arose against his people until there was no remedy and if that's the state of our nation tremble tremble well that's what was happening as Elijah approached Bethel you've got this mob of louts coming out expressing that attitude that probably reflected the attitudes and the approaches of the people of their town you notice the insult they chose I don't know exactly what they were getting at you're bald head

I don't know what that meant I mean I know what it meant but Elisha at this stage was a relatively young man it's probably unlikely that he was sort of naturally bald although some young people I've noticed do get bald rather early but more probably I think the hooligans were laughing at Elisha the word had probably got round that Elisha was Elijah's successor and they were sort of mocking him you really think you were Elijah's successor because Elijah was famously very hairy he had a hairy cloak and he himself was a hairy man it seems did this relatively bald prophet really think he could do Elijah's job I wonder whether there's something of that going on it doesn't really matter precisely what was going on but also baldness or the accusation of baldness could even be associated with the way in which people used to shave out of sorrow or mourning or shame so go up you bald head whatever the exact reasons for it or the exact connotations of it they're saying something like you miserable shameful man you you you you you yeah you can think of your own insults to paraphrase what they were saying probably a good idea not to but you know what I mean how different how different was Elisha's intimidating reception as he approached

Bethel from the earlier respect he received from the men of Jericho I'll tell you something his response was different too verse 24 he turned around and when he saw them he cursed them in the name of the Lord you don't want to read too much between the lines of the Bible it's more important to read the lines than read between the lines you understand that people get into lots of trouble reading between the lines let me have a go these rowdy hoodlums I sort of picture them as Elisha turned round and looked them in the eye I think there's a sort of falling silent don't you think bullies are like that then I see them trembling a little as he fixes his gaze on them

[ 37 : 55 ] I mean Elisha's not intimidated not one bit he fixes his gaze on them and when he spoke I reckon the swagger stopped he cursed them in the name of the Lord you remember what happened in Jericho the prophet proclaimed a saving word a word of healing and here we have the opposite he added a curse a word of judgment both of the messages carried the authority of the Lord thus says the Lord he said in Jericho and now he cursed them in the name of the Lord this is the God who both wounds and heals he blesses and curses he saves and he judges and with some horror

I read verse 24 and two she bears came out of the woods and tore 42 of the youngsters it's not clear that they died perhaps some of them did perhaps even most of them don't know the awful ramifications of the disaster are underlined a little bit because the word in the ESV boys here I just said youngsters it's a word that sort of helps us see them as their mother's sons I won't go into the behind the word but it's a word that sort of reminds you of their birth these lads and judgment fell that day not only of course on the lads but on their homes the homes in which they'd been raised the homes in which they'd been taught to have the attitude they expressed that day it was a dreadful day in

Bethel tears were shed in Bethel that day isn't it odd that the exact number who were mauled by the bear is remembered it suggests that this incident was very carefully remembered in Bethel they did not forget that day when 42 of their sons were attacked by the bear it also indicates as I suggested earlier that the mob that was jeering was quite a large mob there were obviously more than 42 I think there were many more than the 42 in that mob now as far as we know Elisha didn't go into the town of Bethel on this occasion after this hostile reception he moved on Bethel had rejected the Lord's prophet and paid a heavy price it was not only of course the harm that befell the 42 sons of the town but the rejection of the town by God signified by the departure from there of Elisha Bethel would not experience the kind of blessing that had come to Jericho very quickly we've got one more verse to notice with two locations before we just have a quick thought about what do we learn what do we make of these stories verse 25 from there he went on to Mount Carmel Mount Carmel would become Elisha's base as I think it probably had been for Elijah and no reader of this history can hear the name Mount Carmel without being reminded of the showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal recounted in 1 Kings 18 Mount Carmel was the place where the question the question of who truly is God was settled by going to Mount Carmel Elisha was embracing the message of Mount Carmel what is the message of Mount Carmel it is the Lord he is God the Lord he is God excuse me for a moment the question do you remember the question that Elijah put to them on Mount Carmel how long will you go on limping between two opinions if the Lord is God follow him for goodness sake but of course if Baal is God go ahead and follow him and as events unfolded on Mount Carmel it was perfectly clear who was God and who was not and the absolute folly of following a God who is not God was demonstrated that day well he went to Mount Carmel the events at Jericho and Bethel were signs really of the Mount Carmel message the Lord is the one who brings blessing as he did at Jericho and curse judgment as he did at Bethel the Lord he is God and then at the very end of our passage verse 25 and from there he returned to Samaria now that's ominous those words indicate that

[ 43 : 33 ] Elisha he'd been in Samaria previously presumably with Elijah his master when Elijah visited Samaria the Baal worshipper King Ahaziah in 2 Kings chapter 1 pick up the story later on in your own time but Samaria was the city where Ahaziah's father Ahab influenced by his mother Jezebel had built an altar and a house for Baal by returning to Samaria Elisha was taking up the battle against the false gods where Elijah had left off well let me conclude our question is of course what do we make of these two brief stories that have occupied us for the last few minutes as Elisha entered the land God had given to his people Elisha my God saves these signs of God's rule accompanied him the Lord is indeed

God and he is the one who wounds and heals seek mercy from him as the men of Jericho did and you'll find it mock his prophet as the young hooligans of Bethel did and you will suffer the

consequences these are not just two stories they're signs signs of God's kingdom and the reality of God's kingdom means that there really are only two ways there is either life under God's blessing like the people of Jericho or there is death under his judgment like the people of Bethel and the miracles of Elisha like the miracles of Jesus are signs of God's kingdom they point to the message of the king what is the message of the king repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand it's a good kingdom it's a wonderful kingdom it's a magnificent kingdom it's a kingdom of blessing like you cannot get your head around it but this is serious friends I think it's right for me at this point you know one of the things about coming into a church that you don't know well I know of you well and I know some of you well but I don't know you as a church well I don't know every individual and I've got no assumptions and it's perfectly possible in a church like this that there are people there might not be many there might be a few who haven't done that yet who have not yet repented that is not yet turned around and said no God's king is going to be my king tell you there's nothing better the blessings that come from God's king are wonderful in this life and even more glorious in the life to come hear the message of the signs of the kingdom the Lord is king therefore repent and receive him as your king because what the stories we've just followed in these last few moments must impress on us is this as serious it's as serious as it gets let's pray together just have a moment of quiet please as we hear the message of Elisha my God saves has he saved you repent because the kingdom of God is at hand heavenly father we pray for each other we thank you for each other it's so good to be together this weekend in each other's company but we pray for each other we pray that each one of us each one of us wherever we are in life whatever life is holding for us at the moment it's anxieties it's troubles it's fears it's hopes it's joys it's busyness we pray that you just help each one of us to repent to turn away from evil and to receive your wonderful king the lord jesus christ we pray this in his name amen you