

Away Day Talk 2: 2 Kings 1

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[0 : 01] So we're going to read from 1 Kings 22 verse 51 into 2 Kings chapter 1. So that starts on page 366. 1 Kings 22 verse 51.

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2 Kings 22 verse 51.

3 Kings 22 verse 51.

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4 Kings 22 verse 51.

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15. 16. 17. 18. 18. 18. people who like stats like that but what it does do is it highlights for us I think one of the second major themes of the book if this morning was particularly focused on God's governing king and then this afternoon is about God's good God's sure and certain word and again we get a question to which we the readers are already supposed to know the answer so down in verse 16 the Lord says through Elijah is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word now we as the reader are thinking well of course there's a God in Israel and of course he's a God whose word must be obeyed God's word is sure it will not fail but if we've been learning that lesson well it seems the the kings in Israel aren't so quick off the mark I don't know if you spotted it but the book of two kings begins on a positive note verse one Ahab is dead if we've been reading through at one kings we need no convincing even just that snapshot from this morning shows us Ahab is an awful king he led Israel into sin in fact the author tells us to remember there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab however the bad news is Ahab junior follows him and he really is a chip off the old dead block the apple hasn't landed far from the tree so if we scan back to the end of one kings which we had read for us without any chapter or verse divisions we'd be pretty hard pushed to see any break they just follow one book into the other really and so as we move from Ahab to Ahaziah it is no surprise to find the Lord God who's infuriated by idolatry and a defiant dying despot as I mentioned two kings begins with that news Ahab's dead but it looks as if Ahaziah is about to follow follow hot on his heels verse two now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria we don't know what he'd been up to and lay sick so he sent messengers telling them go inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover from this sickness we don't know what he's been up to but he's had a fall it seems it's serious he's not sure if he's going to make it so as he lies in the intensive care unit of Samaria general what does he do well he sends off his lackeys to get some info from Baalzebub the god of Ekron it really is a case of like father like son so I was going to call Ahaziah a desperate dying despot but it gives the impression maybe it's only because he's facing death that he's going after Baal but actually he is defiant he's already had idolatry exposed he may well have been present back in 1 Kings 18 when the Lord God of Israel utterly comprehensively convincingly proved he is the one true God and Baal is no god at all now certainly Ahaziah would have heard about it would have been front page news the Lord God burns Baal to bits in fact the author he's poking fun at Ahaziah he's showing us how stupid idolatry is in verse 2 Ahaziah sends for a message from Baalzebub it means a lord of the flies or the dung god it is a corruption of Baalzebul which means the glorious lord whether it's deliberate or not the Baal prefix tells us everything we need to know Ahaziah is engaged in entrenched idolatry we're left in no kind of doubt about what king he is like just look at verse 52 from the end of 1 Kings he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord he walked in the way of his father and in the way

[10:10] of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin it's not some momentary lapse he walked in the way he embraced all the paganism all the perversion that had built up in Israel it's not like he he got this diagnosis and then just flicks through the yellow pages to find a faith healer I remember chatting with a chap once he came around to clear the drains and when his mother had died he was desperately sad understandably and had tried every kind of spiritualist he could contact so that he could get through to her but this isn't something new for Ahaziah verse 53 he served Baal and worshipped him and provoked the Lord the God of Israel to anger in every way that his father had done so this pursuit of Baalzebub it stems from a lifetime of seeking false gods and it makes the one true God furious it provokes him to anger no reason is given why Ahaziah thinks Baalzebub has any answers no he's just simply following the exposed idolatry of his parents but it does show us how stupid idolatry is it disregards God's word and it doesn't take account of the evidence even when it's exposed as false Baal has already been beaten back at Mount Carmel idolatry is a dead end and yet we all pursue idols as the daily temptation to believe that money or sex or career or family can give the security and satisfaction as only Jesus offers that we know idols are dead and mute and many of us know even from experience ultimately they offer nothing and we've had them exposed in our own life and yet we find ourselves coming back again and the Bible is clear sin is not simply rebellion it is it is also foolish and stupid any king of Israel should have known Ekron it was one of those places where the ark went when the Philistines captured it do you remember that in the Bible and the result was an outbreak of tumors and panic on the Philistines the Philistine gods in Ekron couldn't stand before the ark let alone sustain the health and well-being of the folk living there so why would anyone in their right mind go to

Ekron of all places to find an answer for their health but idolatry is stupid and also it's deadly serious that once again God's word breaks into proceedings and underlines his opposition to idolatry God's word do you notice it clashes violently with Ahaziah's word verse 3 the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite arise go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them is it because there's no God in Israel that you're going to inquire of Baal's above 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 so Elijah went now three times we get the same refrain you see verse 6 then again verse 16 and it shows us this central concern of the chapter there is a God in Israel who's implacably opposed to idolatry who can't be bullied and whose word will succeed given all of that provocation back at the end of at 1 Kings verse 53 the Lord's verdict verse 4 is no surprise just like Genesis 3 Ahaziah has swallowed the line if he rejects the Lord God and his word he will not surely die but God is emphatic literally it says dying you will die in other words God saying you will die I mean really definitely die there is a God in Israel and he is opposed to idolatry and doesn't the world hate this nothing is so offensive as the intolerance of God if there is a God people think well surely all religions lead to the same one I mean we've got friends colleagues family members who think like that we just can't quite escape the shadow of Mount Carmel no there is only one God and so it is right that he hates idolatry worship of anything anyone that's not him not only is it wrong it is folly and it's deadly and doesn't this also expose the futility of thinking we can escape death now Peter Nygaard I don't know whether you've heard of him I think he's embroiled in several lawsuits at the moment but he is also an 82 year old millionaire and he claims that through stem cell treatment he is getting younger and will possibly live forever 2 Kings 1 says don't waste your money whether it's biohacking I think that's all the rage fortune tellers whether it's our own bank balance or bars above of Ekron there is no hope outside of Jesus we cannot cheat death and as we'll see in a moment we definitely can't escape God's just judgment opposed by a defiant dying despot the Lord remains infuriated by idolatry he is the same now as he was then and it's why he will brook no bullies he won't put up with opponents forever there's our second point verses 9 to 15 the Lord God who brooks no bullies we see a protected prophet and a contrite captain I wonder as we were listening did you think why Ahaziah would have been happy with a message from Baal he just wants to hear back from Baal but he wants to see Elijah personally I guess maybe he thinks he can intimidate Elijah and maybe somehow twist God's arm into letting him live or more likely he just wants to silence God's word by wiping out God's spokesperson verses 5 to 8 the king's messengers return having been intercepted by Elijah they repeat verses 3 and 4 and as the police sketch artist puts the finishing touches to the picture

Ahaziah knows already who it is verse 7 he said to them what what kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things they answered him he wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather about his waist and he said it is Elijah the tishbite and maybe Ahab and Jezebel had read him and read him bedtime stories about Elijah the big boogeyman to frighten him that the hairy man who was out to get him and so Ahaziah thinks to himself well if I can't get an answer from Baal I'll get the answer I want out of Elijah and so he sends off his troops to go and get him and I wonder how you felt when verses 9 and 10 were read out verse 9 the king sent to him a captain of 50 men with his 50 he went up to Elijah who is sitting on top of a hill and said to him a 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 then fire came down from heaven and consumed him in his 50 perhaps we think Elijah rather callous do we think it's a little harsh on the captain in his 50 but we mustn't sentimentalise this or forget what's going on just imagine 50 armed police turning up at your front door or imagine you're living in Nazi Germany and 50 men in army uniforms with machine guns rock up you know what's coming don't you this isn't a kind of gentle RSVP a dinner invite from Ahaziah he's sending a whole platoon down and the fact Elijah's told not to be afraid in verse 15 exposes their intent and the odds would seem pretty good for 51 soldiers to be able to bring back one man until remember the Lord God is on Elijah's side the Lord God cannot be bullied but Ahaziah he doesn't get the message so he sends platoon number two with an even more demanding order verse 11 again the king sent to him another captain of 50 men with his 50 and he answered and said to him a man of God this is the king's order come down quickly and exactly the same happens again 51 charred remains are all that's left so verse 13 Ahaziah sends a third lot it underlines Ahaziah's intransigent idolatry his refusal to budge even when 102 of his troops are burnt to ashes even with such a vivid and clear reminder of Mount Carmel well he refuses to budge you see five times we read of fire coming down from heaven verse 10 let fire come down from heaven then the fire came down from heaven verse 12 let fire come down from heaven then the fire came down from heaven verse 14 behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of 50 men with their 50s we get the point don't we it's like a huge arrow back to that massive contest which is no contest at all really

Mount Carmel when fire came down from heaven and he proved he was the one true God and again we get that proof loud and clear there is one God in Israel and he's in total control the fire acts as proof and it also acts as protection Elijah as God's mouthpiece won't be silenced and we saw earlier didn't we with Naboth God doesn't always act like this to protect his people Naboth righteous Naboth killed disinherited Elijah protected you see it's teaching us God won't let his word be silenced and this contrast with the apparent lack of protection of Naboth it also shows us that God is perfectly able to protect his people this side of the cross the Bible is clear all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted but we also know don't we that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him we won't be protected by fire from the sky

I don't think that's God's normal way of working but God still rules and he won't let us go or as Jesus say in John 10 I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand we can take confidence that God does protect his people even though we face persecution it doesn't guarantee physical protection in this life but actually something far more profound far more lasting and supremely God's word won't be silenced Elijah is a protected prophet but we also see don't we this contrite captain with the first two captains that had gone a bit like this you say that I'm a man of God well let's see if I really am and then bam they're incinerated if the first two captains really believed that Elijah was a man of God they wouldn't have treated him so contemptuously and Elijah knows it and it makes this third captain stand out just look how he approaches Elijah verse 13 again the king sent the captain of a third 50 with his 50 and the third captain of 50 went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and entreated him a man of God please let my life and the life of these 50 servants of yours be precious in your sight behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of 50 men with their 50s but now let my life be precious in your sight perhaps spurred on by the sight of 102 charred remains this captain fears the Lord more than he fears Ahaziah now gone is the arrogant order gone is any pretension that he's in control gone is everything except a humble plea that Elijah view his life as precious now we could picture the abject terror in his eyes sweat rolling down his face his knees unable to knock together as he kneels before Elijah any second now he's just expecting a flash and then it'll all be over fear but this fear is saving fear now people may turn their noses up at such ugly motivation to trust in God but as one author puts it better to be trembling and alive than a puddle of carbon in fact this captain stands as a right response of terror before the Lord it is a picture of repentance he knows what's coming he knows it isn't Elijah's life at risk but his own and the lives of his men and so he cries out for mercy

[23 : 24] Hebrews 10 reminds us that for those who reject God's word of salvation there only remains a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries now the captain knows this a truth that Ahaziah so evidently fails to grasp it could be even on a church day away like this you've never really fully considered this truth you've never actually taken that step of repenting of recognising each one of us deserves God's just judgment God is a just judge but he's also gracious and forgiving the cross shows us far more clearly than this captain could ever see God's justice and his mercy Ahaziah gives us the warning I think the captain gives us the encouragement he wasn't any better than the first two he was just humble and contrite before the Lord in Luke chapter 9 we read of Jesus being rejected by a Samaritan village and when his disciples James and John saw it they said Lord do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them perhaps having this passage in mind but what does Jesus do?

he turns and rebukes them we don't rain down judgment on people now is the day of salvation but if people keep refusing to repent judgment is what they'll face describing the church in Revelation 11 John says this if anyone would harm them are the two witnesses picturing the church fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes if anyone would harm them this is how he is doomed to be killed it's not saying you and I will have an invincible life now it is saying God's word cannot will not will never be silenced and to reject God's gospel word is still to face certain death it is a profound encouragement to all of us to repent of our idolatry certainly being a challenge to me to come in reverent fear before God to acknowledge my sin cry out for mercy and forgiveness and if we do that we know the fury of God's fiery anger has been dealt with through the cross because his word is sure and it brings us on to our final point this afternoon which is as simple as it should be unsurprising it comes in the last four verses the Lord God whose word will win a definite decree and we'll pick it up halfway through verse 15

Elijah arose and went down with him to the king and said to him thus says the Lord because you've sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron is it because there's no god in Israel to inquire of his word therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you've gone up but you shall surely die so he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken for the final time we get God's words you shall surely die Ahaziah has listened to the oldest lie in the book you shall not surely die he'd refused to repent he had been given two warning shots across the bow but he had stuck like glue to his idols he had failed to take God at his word and so the reign of Ahaziah comes to an abrupt and an inglorious end he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken now kings come kings go but the word of the Lord stands forever and will not fail it's the Lord who's in complete control his word his word alone will succeed

Ahaziah's word well do you see how much it completely fails his messengers never make it to Ekron and it's only when God says to go down verse 15 Elijah responds but as I was saying one of the major themes of 1 and 2 Kings is God's word always being fulfilled we saw it this morning we see it again here God keeps his word and we can be confident he keeps his word Ahaziah got it so wrong didn't it verse 16 is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word there is a true God and he is a speaking God his word is where we look struck me it's worth looking back isn't it over the last week the last month the last year and think where are we turning for answers where are we listening and where are we looking for guidance for satisfaction for life where do we turn this episode says turn to God's sure word because if we're not listening to God's sure word then we will be listening to the lies of false gods who are no gods at all and the lies that money can satisfy me and that all religions are variants of the truth and that sex outside of marriage has no consequences that I can rescue myself from God's judgment how quick we are to look elsewhere even as committed followers of Jesus apparently a bishop once said he was going to give up the Bible for Lent is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word it is surprising the lengths some people will go to to avoid engaging with God's word but it shouldn't shock us it should be a great comfort to know that God's word will stand as one Peter puts it the grass withers the flower falls but the word of the Lord remains forever and this word is the good news that was preached to you and God's definite decree his sure word means there'll be no miscarriages of justice you see a few weeks ago there was that news story about Andrew Malkinson wrongly imprisoned for 17 years for a crime he didn't commit he might get compensation

I think it's going through the courts at the moment but he can't get the time back or depending on your stats between a third and a half of all murders in the USA are unsolved each year guilty people walking the streets scot-free people ask where is the justice and again God's word breaks in God's good word stands firm Jesus says in John 12 if anyone hears my words and does not keep them I do not judge him for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world but the one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day it's exactly the same isn't it Ahaziah or the third captain if we remain proudly defiant like Ahaziah keep pursuing dead idols keep thinking we can deal with our own mortality keep rejecting Jesus' words and rejecting him then the only possible outcome according to God's sure word is judgment but if we receive Jesus' words there is life if we repent there is forgiveness if we turn to God in humble contrition and cry out for mercy well Jesus takes

[30 : 56] God's fiery fury for us God's word of salvation still stands so will we listen and will we speak will we speak God's words to a world that so desperately needs to hear them because God's word will win we can proclaim it with confidence what an encouragement to tell people about Jesus and the third captain came in fear not shoring whether he would be turned to toast or not living this side of the cross the same fear the same reverence is due God but we can have complete confidence that those who do repent will find forgiveness God's word is sure so let us get on with trusting God's word let us get on with obeying God's word and let us get on with proclaiming God's word there is a God in Israel who is implacably opposed to idolatry he's infuriated by it but he is the one true God who cannot be bullied and his word will always win let's pray together loving heavenly father thank you for the clarity in your word that you are opposed to idolatry and that that is right and good because you are the one true God please forgive us when we have ignored your good word when we have worshipped created things things that are no God at all when we have not given you the glory that is due your name thank you that because of Jesus' death on the cross we can repent and we can be confident of forgiveness and thank you that you are a speaking God please would we all be those who heed your word who humble ourselves before you in reverent fear thank you that we can trust your sure word a word of judgment but also a word of forgiveness for all who turn back to you please help us to keep coming back to your definite word to keep listening to you day by day and finding life and joy as we do so and we ask it all in Jesus name and for your glory

Amen I can trust you 231-6 today Amen