

Elijah III

2 Kings 1-2

Introduction

Last week, we examined 1 Kings 18 and saw there the truths that, first, there is no neutrality between the true God and any other, and second, that Jesus is the only way of salvation. The same themes are evident in the beginning chapters of 2 Kings as well (and really all of Scripture in some way or other teaches these), although there are some different emphases. We see here the authority of God's words and the need to turn to Him. Connected with that is a picture of the ascension of Christ and what it means for His people.

More Fire from Heaven

In the first story, Elijah again stands as a testimony to the truth and power of God's words over and against the words of unbelieving kings and their idols. After the death of Ahab, his son Ahaziah became king of Israel and walked in the ways of his father (1 Kings 22). Not long after his reign begins, Ahaziah falls in his home and is severely injured (in the midst of a political crisis as Moab rebels). He sends messengers to Baal-Zebub ("lord of the flies"), the god of a Philistine city, to inquire if he will recover (2 Kings 1:1-2). Elijah intercepts the messengers and send them back to Ahaziah with a message from Yahweh that the king will not recover. Yahweh asks, Is there no God in Israel that you send to Baal (vs. 3-6). Perceiving that it was Elijah who said this, Ahaziah three times sends a captain and fifty soldiers to capture Elijah. The first two demand by the words of Ahaziah that Elijah come with them, but they are consumed by fire from heaven, confirming that Elijah is a man of God (vs. 7-12). The third captain pleads for mercy from Elijah. The angel of the Lord tells Elijah to not fear but go along with this captain (vs. 13-15). Elijah comes to Ahaziah and repeats the words of the Lord. Ahaziah dies as Yahweh's prophet said (vs. 16-17).

God brings a test to Ahaziah. Moab rebels, breaking some sort of covenant with Israel, and the king becomes injured in his home (a fatal injury, it turns out). There are political problems in Ahaziah's kingdom, and he becomes incapacitated. But Ahaziah turns to another Baal for help and healing. When Elijah condemns him, the king thinks he can intimidate and manipulate Elijah's prophetic words. It is not until the third captain, though, that someone realizes that Elijah serves an authority greater than King Ahaziah. We too doubt whether there is "a God in Israel," and so send to all of our gods of science to tell us if we shall survive (cf. Is. 47:12-13). We are an atheistic, naturalistic, materialistic people, and this means that we have chosen to follow men and their wisdom as gods. This is not so different than worshipping a Baal. Far too often, when disaster falls, we turn to our gods of government and science to save us, instead of as a nation turning to the only true God in humility and repentance to deliver us. We will see this more and more as Christians are coerced into retracting and recanting the truths they have said. We must stand boldly and proclaim the truth like Elijah did without backing down, not out of pride or a desire for vengeance (cf. Luke 9:54-56), but because we trust in our God and His words (cf. Dan. 3:16-18). Ultimately, we can do this because we know that by faith we are covered by the blood of Christ. God is a consuming fire, and either we have been consumed in our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ (like Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel), or we will be consumed ourselves (like Ahaziah's soldiers who threatened God's prophet).

Elijah's Ascension and Elisha's Inheritance

In 1 Kings 2, the words of God and His prophets are again a major theme accompanied by a picture of the power of Christ's ascension. Just before the Lord takes Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha travel to several cities in Israel (Bethel and Jericho), during which time Elisha three times reinforces his commitment to Elijah (1 Kings 2:1-6, like Peter). Finally, they arrive at the Jordan River and Elijah takes up his mantle and strikes the river with it, and it parts so that the two prophets cross on dry ground (vs. 7-8, an exodus scene). At Elijah's prompting, Elisha asks to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit, indicating that he would be Elijah's successor (vs. 9-10, cf. 1 Kings 19:16,19-21). They continue walking and talking together until suddenly they are separated by a fiery chariot with horses of fire, and Elijah is taken up into the sky by a whirlwind (v. 11). Elisha sees it, cries out to Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 13:14), and tears his clothes in two as he sees his master no more (v. 12). Elisha takes up Elijah's mantle and strikes the Jordan River, asking where is the God of Elijah (compare this to Ahaziah in ch. 1). The water divides, and Elisha crosses back over (vs. 13-14, like a new Joshua). Elisha is said to have Elijah's spirit upon him, and Elijah truly is gone (vs. 15-18). While at Jericho, the men there turn to Elisha for help, and Elisha speaks the words of the Lord to heal water that brought death and barrenness (vs. 19-22). Then, near Bethel, Elisha is accosted and mocked by a number of youths (possibly low-ranking officials in the calf-worshiping cult in Bethel).¹ They are cursed for their rejection of the word-bearer, and two female bears maul forty-two of the youths (vs. 23-24). Elisha then heads to Mt. Carmel and to Samaria as the new prophet (v. 25).

Elijah on the one hand is a picture of John the Baptist, the prophet who prepares the way for the Messiah (Matt. 11:13-14). Elijah prepares the way for Elisha to enter into Israel to bring life and light and battle darkness. On the other hand, in his ascension Elijah is a picture of Christ, Who ascends and gives His Spirit to His church, such that it is better for them that He departs (John 16:7).

Conclusion

In His ascension, Jesus also gave His church the charge to go and disciple the world (Matt. 28:18-20). This assumes that you believe what Jesus taught and believe that He has all authority. You cannot teach others what you do not have. Because Jesus ascended and has given you His Holy Spirit, take up the mantle and set about the task that Jesus has placed before you (large or small) believing He is King and is with you always. Christ's ascension begets joyful gospel work, not apathy. This brings us back to one of the primary themes through the life of Elijah, which is the Word of God. Is it true? Do you believe it? Do you trust it? Jesus gave the church a commission and has given you sub-commissions within that, declaring that He will be with you always as you go about doing what He has called you to. Do you believe Him? Do you trust Him? Are His words true? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Tyler Hatcher – July 11, 2021

¹ "[The Hebrew phrase] can refer to youths from twelve to thirty years old (cf. 1 Sam 16:11-12; 2 Sam 14:21; 18:5)." – Paul R. House, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Kings*, pg. 260, fn. 23.