

Last week we left king Ahab mortally wounded after a battle. And what may have appeared as a coincidence where an enemy archer simply pointed his bow in the direction of the Israelites with no aim in mind, hitting Ahab in the only place he could to wound him, was nothing short of God's hand making sure that Ahab's fate would be sealed and God's word becoming sure.

1 Kings 21:18-19 ¹⁸ "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, ^awho is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down to take possession of it. ¹⁹ "You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?"' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours.'"

Unfortunately, the son of Ahab, who became king of Israel in his father's place, didn't humble himself before the Lord.

1 Kings 22:51-53 ⁵¹ Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. ⁵² He did evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. ⁵³ So he served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done.

However, the king of Judah was a man who did seek after God.

1 Kings 22:41-44 ⁴¹ Now Jehoshaphat the son of Asa became king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. ⁴² Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name

was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. ⁴³ He walked in all the way of Asa his father; he did not turn aside from it, doing right in the sight of the LORD. However, the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense on the high places. ⁴⁴ Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel.

So, although Judah and Israel are separate kingdoms at this time there is relative peace between them.

As we come to the first chapter of 2 Kings we see how the king of Israel, Ahaziah, son of Ahab, became injured by falling through the lattice in his upper chamber and became ill. We're not told how he fell through the lattice work, which is usually designed as decorative work to separate space, but if I had to guess alcohol may have been involved. (Pure speculation).

Be that as it may, this injury is serious enough to where he can't get out of bed. And wanting to know the future effects of this injury he inquires of a false god. Evidently, he didn't learn much from his father's death.

2 Kings 1:2 So he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover from this sickness."

But because Ahaziah was still king over God's people, God intervenes by sending a message to the king through Elijah.

2 Kings 1:3-4 ³ But 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 is no God in Israel *that* you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' ⁴ "Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" Then Elijah departed.

Well, the messengers of Ahaziah take the message back to the king. The king wasn't happy with the message and so he sends a captain with fifty men to get clarification from Elijah.

2 Kings 1:9-10 ⁹ Then *the king* sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" ¹⁰ Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

Now, why do you suppose Elijah responds the way he does and why does God cause fire to come down from heaven to consume them?

The first thing to notice is that the captain, on the command from Ahaziah, addresses Elijah as a man of God. If you believe that your god is authoritative enough to seek answers from him for the future; in this case Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, then why be concerned about what the God of Elijah thinks?

And this is Elijah's point. If I am a man of God, then it would stand to reason that my God is greater than any god. And if you're going to learn anything from history, and in this case a history that only goes back a couple of years, then don't address me as a man of God unless you intend to submit to my God.

What history would Elijah be inferring in this case?

The history of calling fire from heaven to consume the false prophets and priests who were called out by Elijah for a head to head competition between the one true God and the false gods of Ahab.

This should have been fresh in the mind of Ahaziah but instead he seeks the god of Baal, whose priests were destroyed by the hand of God, and then has the audacity to try and cover his bases by seeking the God of Elijah, just in case his false god doesn't get back to him, or maybe to simply destroy the messenger of the one true God.

In either case, God is going to make it clear that He's the same God who has all power and authority and just as He brought fire from heaven to destroy the priests of Baal, God now destroys the captain and his fifty men. In fact, a second set of captains and fifty men go back out and they too are destroyed the same way.

It isn't until a third group is sent out that this last captain understands precisely what he has stepped in.

2 Kings 1:13-15 ¹³ So he again sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. When the third captain of fifty went up, he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and begged him and said to him, "O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. ¹⁴ "Behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight." ¹⁵ The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king.

And so, when Elijah approaches the king he asks him the same question he posed to the previous 2 captains with their respective 50 men and it was this.

2 Kings 1:16-17 ¹⁶ Then he said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron-- is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of

His word?-- therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die." ¹⁷ So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

So, again we must ask the question, to what extent does God enter into the affairs of men and specifically a man who seeks after false gods?

So, Elijah has been faithful to serve God in whatever capacity God has called him, and what has been Elijah's ministry been dedicated to?

Judgment on the house of Ahab. Imagine your entire ministry being dedicated to one man. This is precisely what we see and though Elijah at times became weary in this task he does not waver in the final analysis.

And so, we come to one of the most amazing parts of history and that is the closing chapter of Elijah's ministry.

2 Kings 2:1-25 ^{NAU} And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ Then the sons of the prophets who *were at* Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still." ⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who *were*

at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still." ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite *them* at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." ¹⁰ He said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." ¹¹ As they were going along and talking, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. ¹² Elisha saw *it* and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over. ¹⁵ Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho opposite *him* saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him. ¹⁶ They said to him, "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men, please let them go and search for your master; perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him

up and cast him on some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send." ¹⁷ But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, "Send." They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched three days but did not find him. ¹⁸ They returned to him while he was staying at Jericho; and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go '?" ¹⁹ Then the men of the city said to Elisha, "Behold now, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful." ²⁰ He said, "Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it." So they brought *it* to him. ²¹ He went out to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'" ²² So the waters have been purified to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke. ²³ Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked him and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!" ²⁴ When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number. ²⁵ He went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

There is an awful lot here that I want to look at and we'll get as far as we can this morning.

The first thing is that Elijah's departure from this planet was not a surprise to Elijah. God had evidently made it clear to him that this was to take place in the near future and this is the reason that Elijah takes Elisha with him because he knows that the ministry that belonged to him was now going to be transferred to Elisha.

But not only was it not a surprise to Elijah, it wasn't a surprise to many of the other people in the region. In fact, what I find

interesting is that Elijah is being led along the way to a particular place. But it's being done in steps.

Gilgal is where Elijah and Elisha start. Elijah tells Elisha to stay in Gilgal because as Elijah describes it, he got a word from God to go to Bethel and the message doesn't seem to include Elisha going with him.

Elisha gets the impression that though the word of the Lord came to Elijah to go to Bethel it doesn't explicitly exclude Elisha from going with Elijah. And so, he insists that he go with Elijah.

Now Gilgal is in the valley of Jericho. Bethel is almost due east and a little north about 15 miles as the crow flies. The two of them journey off to Bethel, about a half a day's walk.

When they get to Bethel they find a group of prophets who have also been informed that Elijah's ministry was coming to a close and that the Lord was going to take him away. But notice who the prophets go to.

2 Kings 2:3 ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; hold your peace."

So, once they arrive at Bethel and receive the news from the prophets Elijah informs Elisha that the Lord has directed him to Jericho. Now Jericho is back in the direction of where they just came from about 12 miles east and just a little south. In fact, Jericho is about 2-3 miles from where they started in Gilgal, which is just north of Jericho.

Why do you suppose that God has got them walking in circles?

Part of the reason might be that God is parading his prophet before the people's as a testimony to the prophets who are in the region who apparently have been told by God that Elijah's ministry is coming to a close.

Again, once they get to Jericho who comes out to Elisha to give him the news that Elijah is about to be taken away by God?

The prophets of God.

2 Kings 2:5 ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; hold your peace."

But we're still not done. Elijah gets word from the Lord that he must now go to the Jordan.

2 Kings 2:6 ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Tarry here, I pray you; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

Keep in mind that the prophets told Elisha that it would be today that the Lord would take Elijah which means that the same day that they first set out to Bethel that would be the same day that God would take Elijah which means that they were on the move from city to city that entire day.

And so, from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho is about a days journey of some 22-25 miles. But from Jericho to the Jordan River is about 5 miles, so in all likelihood, Elijah and Elisha end up at the Jordan, again only about 3-4 miles from where they first started this journey, around the end of the day.

By this time, you've got the pied piper effect where there is a trail of people following Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan to see what God is going to do.

2 Kings 2:7 ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.

And so, as these prophets looked on there is one more bit of traveling both Elijah and Elisha must do. And by the way, this is the first time in all of their travels that Elijah does not tell Elisha to stay behind. This time the both of them go together.

But notice where they go and how they get there.

2 Kings 2:8 ⁸ Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

Now keep in mind that they are at a place that is opposite Jericho on the Jordan River.

What is significant about this precise place in the history of Israel?

Joshua 3:14-17 ¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters which were flowing down from above stood *and* rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt

Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

Notice that this is not only the place where the Israelites entered into the promised land it is also the place where the waters were backed up and they went across the Jordan on dry ground, precisely the way that Elijah and Elisha were exiting the place where the Jews first entered the land.

Why do you think that God would cause Elijah and Elisha to come to this precise place to bring Elijah's ministry to an end and to start the ministry of Elisha?

It's a beginning and an end point in God's redemptive plan.

When Joshua entered Jericho by crossing the Jordan at this place this was his beginning as leader of Israel. But whose ending point was it? Moses' ministry came to an end here.

Joshua 1:1-2 ^{NAU} Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, ² "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.

^{NAU} **Deuteronomy 34:6** And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day.

One man's ministry ends and another begins and it is the Lord who directs the steps and in the process uses reminders and memorials along the way to show how He is at work in the lives of His people

for one reason, so that we may fear the Lord our God and magnify His name throughout the whole earth.

Remember Gilgal, where their journey started just a few miles from where they are now on the other side of the Jordan?

Joshua 4:19-24 ¹⁹ Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. ²⁰ Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹ He said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' ²² then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³ "For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; ²⁴ that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

We'll pick around 2Kings 2:9 next week.