

# KINGS OF ISRAEL II: 1 & 2 KINGS

WEEK 4-5

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# OUTLINE

## WHO IS KING? WHO IS LORD?

Elijah, Elisha and the Baal Contest  
Other Prophets and Ben-Hadad

## TRANSITIONS

Announcement  
Fulfillment

## A POLARIZED CONCLUSION

Kings on the Extremes  
A Moral Tale

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## UGARITIC BAAL EPIC

Like Moses and the ten plagues, Elijah and Elisha are Yahweh's agents in representing his supremacy over Baal.

1. Fire—Elijah defeats Baal's prophets on Mt. Carmel with fire from heaven. He also annihilates Ahaziah's soldiers through fire.
2. Rain—Elijah prays first for the absence and then the presence of rain.
3. Oil and meal/flour—Both Elijah and Elisha provide abundant oil to widows. Both use flour to bring life: one to the widow, the other through the cleansing the pot of stew.
4. Child Giving—Elisha promises the Shunammite woman a child.

## UGARITIC BAAL EPIC

5. Healing—Elisha heals Naaman of his leprosy.
6. “Resurrection”—Elijah and Elisha both raise someone from the dead: Elijah, the son the widow of Zarephath; Elisha, the son of the Shunammite
7. Ascent—Elijah is caught up in the chariots of fire
8. Defeating the River God (Yam)—Both Elijah and Elisha Divide the Jordan; Elisha recovers the floating axhead from the Jordan

## UGARITIC BAAL EPIC

*Before the discovery of the Ugaritic sources the Elijah and Elisha narratives were regarded as having been embellished by popular imagination. It was thought that they were the product of popular lore . . . In light of the Ugaritic texts a different and more profound appreciation for these events was revealed to the student of Scripture . . . They are not the work of simple people, but by a well informed author who was intimately acquainted with the Canaanite mythology and protested against it by showing that all powers in heaven and earth are under control of Israel's God. (Bronner, 139-40)*

## SLAUGHTERED “CHILDREN”

It appears that one of Elisha's first “miracles” is to send bears to slaughter a bunch of children.

*2 Kings 2:23-25 [NASB]—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!” 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. He went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.*

What can we say about this brutal affair?

## SLAUGHTERED “CHILDREN”

What can we say about this brutal affair?

- ▶ Independent of the age of the ‘lads,’ they are from Bethel (Jeroboam’s city of idolatry) and openly scorn God’s prophet *because* he’s a prophet. “Go up!” most likely refers either to his journey to Mt. Carmel or bodily translation like Elijah.
- ▶ Supposing they are on the younger side, this could also be symptomatic of the wholesale surrender to wickedness of Israel. Even the children revile Yahweh and mock his messengers.
- ▶ The word translated ‘lad’ means anywhere from a boy to an adolescent. In I Sam 20:35, the same phrase is used, indicating that the oldest end is improbable. Given the semantic range and their behavior, particularly young children are unlikely. I would imagine ages between 10 and 14.

There are other cases where children are drawn up in a wider judgment. What should we make of those?

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## ANONYMOUS PROPHETS

Other prophets appear during Israel's fights with Aram. The Aramean king's name is Ben-Hadad, meaning "Son of Hadad," a storm God. In contrast to the Baal contest, Ahab is on the side of Yahweh, but the stakes are comparable.

1. In 20:13, we read that God wants Ahab to know that God is who he says he is. In 20:28, before the second battle, the same refrain is repeated: "then you will know that I am LORD."
2. No doubt, the Aramean armies will also be learning who is God. Ben-Hadad's blasphemous name and the Aramean's speculation about the strength of Israel's "gods" raises the stakes.

Just like the Exodus, God is eager to reveal his glory both to Israel and to the nations.

## MICAIAH AND THE DIVINE COUNCIL

This is a theologically rich passage:

1. God fulfills the prophecy that Ahab will die instead because he spared Ben-Hadad (20:42) and that dogs would lick up his blood in the same place as Naboth's (21:19).
2. Micaiah's vision of spirits presenting themselves to the divine council (cf. Job 1:6) mirrors the prophets presenting themselves to the kings.
3. There is a spirit who proposes to deceive Ahab by lying to his prophets. What should we make of the deceiving spirit? (Cf. Job 1:6).
4. Presuming that this spirit is demonic, there is an elegant irony and parallel present: Micaiah is an outsider as Yahweh's prophet among the false prophets; likewise the demon is an outsider in the divine council. By disclosing this information, Micaiah ironically warns Ahab not to go into battle, but Ahab interprets this as bad prophecy, thereby listening to the demon—the voice to which he's always listened.

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## MOUNTAIN OF GOD

When Elijah goes to the Mountain of God, the expected place at this stage in God's personal revelation is Zion, the location of the temple. Yet, Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb, another name for Sinai. This is especially unusual in the present book for two reasons:

1. The temple is built and filled with God's presence only a few chapters before.
2. Even during the dedication of the temple, Solomon indicates that God cannot be contained in a temple. This raises the question: if Elijah were to go somewhere other than the temple, why some *specific* place? Indeed, why *this* specific place?

What might motivate this switch?

## MOUNTAIN OF GOD

What might motivate this switch?

- ▶ The text says *the* cave, suggesting that this could be the very place where God revealed his glory to Moses.
- ▶ This place is the fount of God's special revelation to Israel. This is the source of Israel's theological, legal, national identity.
- ▶ Israel has badly degraded. More speculatively, just as the people and even the place of worship have regressed, so too Elijah takes a regressive path to seek God. Elijah is operating as a kind of *type* of Moses: a uniquely appointed messenger of God with special revelation in the exact same place.

## EARTH(QUAKE), WIND, AND FIRE

In I Kings 19, Elijah is given instructions by God. There is a very carefully structured literary parallelism.

A	9a	Setting: at the cave	A'	13b
B	9b	“What Are Doing Here Elijah?”	B'	13c
C	10	I have been zealous, kill me too	C'	14
D	11a	Yahweh says, Go	D'	15a

## EARTH(QUAKE), WIND, AND FIRE

E	11b	Wind, Not the Lord
F	11c	Earthquake, Not the Lord
G	12a	Fire, Not the Lord
H	12b-13a	Sound of Gentle Quiet, the Lord Arrives
E'	15b	Anoint Hazael
F'	16a	Anoint Jehu
G'	16b	Anoint Elisha
E''	17a	Hazael kills
F''	17b	Jehu kills
G''	17c	Elisha kills
H'	18	The Remnant of 7,000

From the parallelism, Waltke argues God is *behind* but not really *in* the political chaos. But he is *in* the remnant.

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## WHEN EXACTLY?

The fulfillment of these predictions occur completely out of order. Also, Elijah only commissions Elisha; Elisha “affirms” Hazael; a *servant* of Elisha (actually) anoints Jehu. Furthermore, this verse appears to require that they are sequential:

*1 Kings 19:17 (NASB) It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death.*

Most likely the order is based on their role in destroying the house of Ahab and the reign of Baal. Hazael wounds Je(ho)ram (II Kings 9:14-15); Jehu slaughters nearly everyone (9:24, 37; 10:28). Elisha’s role is peculiar. There is no (obvious) evidence that he kills any member of Ahab’s family, nor anyone for that matter with a sword (if we follow the parallelism).

## WHEN EXACTLY?

How to explain Elisha?

1. No one is left after Jehu! So, the statement is vacuously satisfied. In other words, if there had been one who escaped Jehu's sword, Elisha would have finished the job.
2. Elisha participated unmentioned in Jehu's attack on Ahab's family and prophets (cf. II Kings 10:24)
3. Waltke argues that Elisha brings spiritual death through his prophecies.

None of these is especially satisfying. While such interpretative difficulties are a nuisance, they actually undergird the authenticity of the prophecy. Why?

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## INTRODUCTION

Here we see some of the best kings in all of Israel's history (Hezekiah and Josiah) as well as arguably the worst king (Manasseh). What might have impacted this?

- ▶ With the Northern kingdom in exile and Assyria bearing down, the kings will be more desperate. This would lead to a full-hearted pursuit of the living God or a competitor.
- ▶ In the case of Hezekiah, God rewards his faithfulness with greater revelation: several miracles, encouraging messages from Isaiah and so on. This represents the broader lesson that *faith comes to faith*.
- ▶ In the case of the wicked kings, they probably surrendered to the pragmatic temptation (Ps 73:2-3), growing envious of the neighboring nations' prosperity. Rather than see the escalation of judgment as a result of disobedience (correctable by repentance), they pursued their own means of salvation: adopt the neighboring gods to gain comparable prosperity.

## HEZEKIAH & JOSIAH

Hezekiah is an especially strange island of soundness. Both his father (Ahaz) and his son (Manasseh) were abnormally evil. Ahaz goes out of his way to build a competing altar for an Assyrian god; likewise for Manasseh (more below).

Boiled down, these extreme kings were characterized by whether they trusted God and *acted* on his revealed word or something within his own purview.

How would you reconcile these superlatives about Hezekiah and Josiah?

*II Kings 18:5-6—Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.*

*23:25—Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.*

# MANASSEH

The son of Hezekiah is surprisingly wicked.

- ▶ He *rebuilt* the high places destroyed by Hezekiah.
- ▶ Unlike Ahaz who built rival altars, Manasseh went as far as to place them in the temple!
- ▶ He is one of the only kings of whom we read that he explicitly sacrificed his children. (There is a chance others did.)

He does not merely fail to resist pagan encroachment, he actively seeks it. While many other kings were evil, this episode was the last straw for God (Cf. Lev 26:14, 18, 21, 23, 27, 36):

*II Kings 21:13— I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.*

## A BIT OF GRAY

Although clear negative verdicts are delivered concerning some of these kings, it's worth noting softness to God, however little.

**AHAB** 1 Kings 21:27—When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

**MANASSEH** 2 Chronicles 33:13—And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.

**JE(HO)ASH** 2 Kings 13:14—Now Elisha had been suffering from the illness from which he died. Jehoash king of Israel went down to see him and wept over him. “My father! My father!” he cried. “The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”

As evangelists, we must be especially careful not to write someone off permanently. People are not fated to be one way or another.

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## ENTERING EXILE

II Kings 17 is a full-throated condemnation of Israel. Although this follows the exile of the Northern kingdom, the author foreshadows the exile of the Southern kingdom as well.

He explicitly lists the (major) failures of Israel, making reference both to the law and to the relevant consequences.

## ENTERING EXILE

II Kings 17:12—They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, “You shall not do this.”

17:15a—They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep.

17:15b—They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, “Do not do as they do.”

Deut 5:7-8—You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

7:12 NIV—If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors.

12:30b—be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, “How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.”

## ENTERING EXILE

11 Kings 17:17—They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.

17:20—Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.

Deut 18:10-11—Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

28:64—Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known.

## CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE

God will only tolerate so much. Even Josiah's whole-hearted embrace of the law was not enough to reverse the course.

Huldah announced:

*2 Kings 22:17—Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.*

In the midst of exile, a tiny sliver of (Davidic) light shines on an otherwise dark conclusion:

*2 Kings 25:29-30—So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived.*

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