

II KINGS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to II Kings chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we move into II Kings this evening keep in mind that it is a continuation of I Kings and it continues the story of the divided kingdom, with the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. As we saw last time, at the close of I Kings, Ahab died and his son Ahaziah came to the throne in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And Ahaziah was not as wicked as his father Ahab was, but he was still bad! In the Southern Kingdom of Judah we see Jehoshaphat on the throne and he was a good king, he loved the Lord.

And the prophets at this time were Elijah and Elisha, who would take over for Elijah, as we will see tonight. So as dark as things may look for the Northern Kingdom of Israel, God has His prophets, His servants who will shine for Him, who will speak for Him!

But make no mistake about it, both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah will move away from the Lord and they will be brought into captivity because of it. Samuel Ridout made these remarks regarding the book of II Kings. He wrote, "The history of the Kings is one of downward progress; things get darker and darker until there is no remedy. . . . The ten tribes are first carried away captive, then the two tribes." With that said, let's begin reading in II Kings chapter 1, starting in verse 1 as we continue looking at the Northern Kingdom of Israel under the reign of Ahaziah and see what the Lord has for us this evening.

II KINGS 1

VERSE 1

1. Keep in mind that Moab was located on the east side of the Jordan River, by the Dead Sea. And Moab was under the power of Israel before the kingdom was divided, for in II Samuel 8:2 we see David put them under his authority and taxed them. Then, when the kingdom was divided, the Moabites were under the authority of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they kept the taxation going. But now Ahab is dead, the power of the Northern Kingdom of Israel is diminishing, and thus, the Moabites are beginning to revolt, they want their freedom. The seeds of rebellion have been sown and under the right conditions they will spring forth against Israel and we will see this take place as we get to our study in II Kings chapter 3.

VERSE 2

1. The focus here is the Northern Kingdom of Israel and specifically king Ahaziah. We may call him “king grace” or the Steve Erkle from the television show Family Matters, of his day! Ahaziah falls off his house you might say, he fell from the second floor balcony and he injured himself. I guess you can say he fell and he couldn’t get up! And who is the first one he seeks help from? It is not the Lord but the Lord of the flies, Baal-Zebub, a Philistine god of the city of Ekron, which was about 40 miles away, to the west. And he is seeking counsel from this god, he wants to know if he will recover from this injury, which tells me it must have been bad! Thus, he sends messengers to go and inquire of Baal-Zebub.

2. By the time we get to the New Testament, the name Baal-Zebub is associated with Satan and that truly is the reality. If you are worshiping anyone or anything besides the Lord, then you are worshiping a demon! Some may argue and say that they don't worship anyone or anything, but that is not true. You have made yourself a god! It is amazing what people will worship, who they will turn to in times of need instead of the Lord. Paul tells us in Romans 1:20-25, **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”** To deny God you have to suppress the truth and thus, if you do that, God will give you over to what is in your heart and it is not a good thing!

VERSES 3-4

1. Now talk about your tough ministry. God tells Elijah to meet up with these messengers and tell them that Ahaziah is going to die! He will rebuke the king for his failure in seeking counsel from God and instead, going to the lord of the flies for his counsel. Thus, after 2 short years reigning over Israel, judgment was coming upon him and this injury he sustained in this fall, will eventually kill him. After Elijah speaks these words to Ahaziah's messengers, he splits, leaving Ahaziah to meditate on this counsel from God as he hears this news!

2. What Elijah has said to the king's messengers I believe God is saying to us today! Why do we go to programs, why do we go to manmade synthetic activities to build up the church of God? Is there no God in our land today that we must use other things to keep the church healthy? If we go down that path, that church will die! Not the church of Jesus Christ, but those churches that have Jesus outside knocking to get in will die, first spiritually and then physically! We need to keep God in the center of our life as well as in the center of the church because apart from Him we can do nothing, nothing that He will accept!

VERSES 5-8

1. This journey to Ekron would have taken some time and when these messengers arrived back so soon, the king wanted to know why they didn't carry out their mission. And when Ahaziah hears what his men have to say, the counsel they received from a man they meet on their way to Ekron, he knew that this was none other than Elijah. And I do love this little encounter here. The king asks his men what this guy looked like and when they describe him, he says, "**It is Elijah the Tishbite.**" You see, prophets in those days were easy to recognize by what they wore, dark goats hair garments and large leather belts. I don't think when it says that he was a "**hairy man**" it was speaking of body hair, but his clothing.

Also, keep in mind that Ahaziah must have remembered what his dad, Ahab went through with Elijah, and he is still a thorn in the side of this family. And for this prophet of God, it was more than just his appearance. You see, Elijah lived what he spoke. His faith was real and when he spoke the truth of God, those words pierced a man's heart. He was not speaking from his own heart, but from God and for God! What a great lesson for us!

2. We are also told that Elijah was a "**Tishbite**" and the idea here is that he was from Tishbi in Gilead, the upper Galilee region. Now what is interesting to me is that the word "**Tishbite**" means, "one who turns or converts." You see, Elijah's words were to cut away the hardness of a person's heart and expose the person to God. Even his name, "**Elijah**" means, "YAHWEH is my God."

Now, as you speak forth the truths of God to people there will be two kinds of responses. The first is that the conviction will draw them to God as we see after Peter gave his sermon on the day of Pentecost and we are told, **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”** Acts 2:36-37. Conviction brought them to saving faith as Peter tells them that they need to repent and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. So some do turn to Christ.

And others don’t turn to Christ, the conviction of God is so heavy upon their lives and they refuse to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior that they attack those who are speaking the truth and they try to close their ears so they don’t have to hear it anymore. We see this played out for us as Stephen was speaking before the Jewish religious council in Acts chapter 7 and we are told, **“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”** Acts 7:55-60.

Now they may not stone you with stones when you speak of Jesus, but they will close their ears many times to what you are saying. But we still need to be people who help others to turn or convert to God because **YAHWEH** is our God!

VERSES 9-10

1. Ahaziah wants Elijah brought to him, so he sends out 50 men to bring him back alive. Do you think that was a little overkill, 50 men plus their leader coming for one man? Normally it would be, but you could have had 100 million come after Elijah and they still could not capture him because God was fighting for him! Thus, these men recognize that this is a prophet of God but they still ask him to come down and Elijah basically tells them, “Look, if I am a prophet of God, maybe I am and maybe I am not, but if I am, fire is coming down from heaven and you will be destroyed!” And that is exactly what happens, fire comes down and all the men are destroyed!
2. Now some may argue and say that this was not right, why did Elijah have to destroy all 50 men plus their leader? Adam Clarke correctly puts this into perspective for us as he wrote; “Some have blamed the prophet for destroying these men, by bringing down fire from heaven upon them. But they do not consider that it was no more possible for *Elijah* to bring down fire from heaven, than for *them* to do it. *God alone* could send the fire; and as he is *just* and *good*, he would not have destroyed these men had there not been a *sufficient cause* to justify the act.” You see, God was protecting His servant Elijah and it was right, it was fair because God is a holy and righteous God and just because we might not understand it, doesn’t make it wrong!

Think about it this way. As a kid did you always understand and agree with your parents when they punished you? Of course you didn't and as much as earthly parents try to be right and fair, when God does something He always is!

VERSES 11-12

1. So the king, in losing his first 50 men, sends out a second group. Another 50 that go out and request Elijah to come down and appear before the king and they are a little more forceful and request this prophet of God to come down immediately. And they too are consumed by fire from God. And some have a problem with this, in that God should have held Ahaziah accountable, and not these men, they were just carrying out the king's orders. That is true, but these men were responsible for their actions and the way they treated this prophet of God was showing disrespect towards God. Thus, they were turned to toast! We are going to see next how God responds when another 50 men come and their leader humbles himself before Elijah. The first two did not humble themselves and we saw what happened to them!

VERSES 13-15

1. Now here comes this third captain, and he has heard what took place to the previous two captains and their men. He not only heard what has happened to them, but as he approaches Elijah I'm sure he can see the burn marks of where these men once stood. And notice his response before Elijah; he seeks mercy from this prophet of God, for he has seen the results of leaders coming before Elijah in a haughty and prideful spirit. He recognizes that God is alive and He is still living in Israel, He is still active and there is no God like Him! And upon hearing this man's request, the Lord tells Elijah to go with him and not to be afraid of Ahaziah. And Elijah goes with this man and his men to Ahaziah, the king of Israel.

2. Now how does this relate to us today? We can read in Luke 9:51-56 about Jesus, James and John who were in the same area that Elijah was in here in II Kings chapter 1, and when the Samaritans refused them, James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven, just as Elijah did, and destroy these people for their rebellious spirit. But Jesus rebuked them. Why did Jesus rebuke his men? This is important for us to understand. You see, we are living in the age of grace; we are living in a time where God is seeking to save men's lives, not to destroy them. Once the age of grace is over, once the Tribulation Period begins, you will see God's judgment being poured out from heaven upon a Christ rejecting world.

We too must remember that fact, that God is seeking to save people, not destroy them, and He is using us as instruments to touch the lives of the lost and share Christ with them. Remember what Jesus said to his men who wanted to call fire down from heaven and destroy these people who rejected their message, **“For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.’ . . .”** Luke 9:56. May we not lose sight of that because Jesus came not to condemn us but to save us! We are already condemned!

VERSE 16

1. This was the same message that was given by Elijah to Ahaziah's messengers when they went to inquire of Baal-Zebub. He was not going to recover from this fall. He was going to die! And think of it like this. The message of God did not change just because Ahaziah didn't want to hear it the first time! What a lesson for those in the church today who water down God's Word, don't speak of sin, of repentance, of atonement because these things are offensive to people, it is not the message they want to hear. Folk's, they may not want to hear it but God's message does not change just because they don't want to hear it. May we not forget that!

VERSES 17-18

1. And so Ahaziah dies and in his death, his brother Jehoram takes over the Northern Kingdom of Israel, for Ahaziah had no son to take over the throne from him.

2. Now this gets a little confusing for us here because not only was there a Jehoram on the throne in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but also there was a Jehoram on the throne in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. But they were not related, for in Israel, this was the son of Ahab and the brother of Ahaziah. And in Judah, this was the son of Jehoshaphat and it seems that there was a co-reign for a time with Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram.

3. As we move into chapter 2 the focus is on Elijah's ministry coming to an end and Elisha's ministry beginning. So let's take a look at these fascinating events that have transpired in the lives of these men.

II KINGS 2

VERSES 1-3

1. Remember back in I Kings 19:16 where God told Elijah that Elisha was going to take over his ministry. Now that time has come. When Elijah called Elisha, he burned all the tools of his trade, and followed after Elijah. That was an important step, he cut the ties that held him and there was no turning back for Elisha. And now Elijah is testing him, to see if he will truly follow after him, for he is to carry on the work of Elijah. And Elisha would not leave the side of Elijah; he wanted to stay as close as possible to him.

2. Now these sons of the prophets attended the school of the prophets, which was nothing more than a seminary for these men, who had been called by God, who were gifted by God, and needed training in the Scriptures. It seems that not only was Elisha aware of the departure of his friend, but so were these prophets. And as they bring this fact up to Elisha, he did not want to talk about it.

VERSES 4-7

1. Elijah is taking this young protégé on this farewell visit to Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and towards the Jordan River. And Elijah keeps testing him to see if he was going to continue to follow after him. He is testing the devotion of Elisha and as we see, Elisha is sold out to serve, in any capacity. He was going to stay with Elijah until God took him away.

2. Now, for these young sons of the prophets, they are stuck on reminding Elisha that his friend's departure is quickly coming, and again, Elisha does not want to talk about it.

Why does Elisha seem so harsh here? Well, think about it. Did Elisha know what was going to happen to Elijah? Absolutely and thus, what these prophets were doing were repeating what he already knew and it was not helpful, it was a hard thing to take and they kept bringing it up! May we be careful as we speak to people that we give them what they need to hear and not just repeat information that will only hurt!

VERSES 8-10

1. As these young prophets watched Elijah, they witnessed the dividing of the Jordan River so that both he and Elisha could cross over on dry ground, and go to the east side of the Jordan River. This showed these young prophets that Elijah's authority came from God, for this miracle was similar to what took place with Joshua, as they crossed over the Jordan River, to the land of Canaan, on dry ground.

2. Before Elijah departs, he offers Elisha whatever he wants. His request is simple, a double portion of the spirit that was upon him. Now some feel that what Elisha was asking for was to be able to do twice as much as Elijah did. That may be very true, for Elisha did twice as many miracles as Elijah did. But I also believe that Elisha was asking for the rights of the first-born. You see, the first-born was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance and in the death of the father; it would be the first-born who took over in the fathers place. (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). And, in a sense, that is what Elisha was doing, taking over for Elijah. Elisha was already called to the ministry and he is asking for the power to complete that calling!

And think about what he asked for and what he didn't ask for. He was not concerned about possessions, but his service for the Lord. It is as F. B. Meyer wrote, "He sought neither wealth, nor position, nor worldly power; nor a share in those advantages on which he had turned his back for ever." Are we being drawn back into this world, more concerned about worldly possessions than we are about the Lord? That is a question we must ask ourselves.

3. Now keep in mind that Elijah could not give that to him, only God could. And so, if Elisha saw him taken away, he would receive this gift. And if Elisha did not see him taken away, then he would not receive this gift. In regards to all this, F. B. Meyer again wrote, “It was with the object of testing the spirit of his friend that the departing seer had urged him again and again to leave him. And it was only when Elisha had stood the test with such unwavering resolution that Elijah was able to give him this *carte blanche*.”

God is looking for faithful people to carry on His work. It is not about our ability but our availability!

VERSES 11-13

1. As Elisha watched, God took Elijah up into heaven by a whirlwind, not by the chariot and horses. That is what separated Elijah from Elisha, but he was taken into heaven in the whirlwind! Thus, Elisha has now received a double portion or the rights of the first-born, and will now take over Elijah’s ministry. And when Elisha said “**My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horseman!**” he was speaking of Elijah. The term “**father**” was a term of respect and honor, which Elisha gave to Elijah and Elijah was truly the strength of Israel, more than the chariot and more than horses.

And as Elijah is taken up into heaven Elisha saw the mantle and picked it up. Folk's, did you notice that the mantle did not fall from heaven and rest upon the shoulders of Elisha. He had to physically pick it up; he had to make that decision, that choice. He had to think, "Do I really want to do this? Do I really want to put this on?" You see, yes there was great power in the ministry of Elijah, but there was also great pressure, responsibility, persecution and-so-on. Many who want to get involved in ministry want it dropped into their lap and they don't want to pick anything up. Ministry is work, that is the bottom line, it is not easy but it is what we are called to do!

2. As Elisha witnesses this, he tears his clothes, which was a sign of mourning. What happened many times was that it was just an empty showing of emotions, and was meaningless. Not for Elisha and it should not be for us. You see, God is interested in our heart, that our heart is broken and exposed before Him, and not just an outward showing for all to see.

3. Look at the ministry of Elisha and see how it compares with the ministry of Moses.

Both of them:

- Stood alone for righteousness.
- Were associated with fire upon mountains.
- Were associated with the desert.
- Met God on Sinai.
- Were chased out of their countries by pagan rulers.
- Knew God's miraculous provision for food and water.

- Wandered in the desert for a period measured by 40.
- Fasted for 40 days.
- Were powerful examples of prayer.
- Parted waters.
- Had close associates who succeeded them.
- Had successors that parted waters also.
- Had mysterious or strange deaths.

4. Now I like the way that Elijah's life comes to an end. He is in the middle of ministry and he is taken home. When it is time for me to go home and be with the Lord I pray that it happens when I am right in the middle of ministry, involved in the things of God, whatever it may be. And after I am gone, that those I have come in contact with will carry on the work of God. What a joy that would be!

VERSES 14-15

1. So as these prophets were watching and they see that Elijah is gone they also see that Elisha is left and he is standing by the Jordan River. Why are they watching Elisha closely? Because they were watching to see what he is going to do, will he be the one to carry on the ministry now that Elijah is gone? And notice that Elisha is not asking about where Elijah is but is seeking the God of Elijah and that is important. Thus, just as Elijah separated the waters of the Jordan River, Elisha, showing all who were watching that the ministry of Elijah has now been passed to him and he does the same, he parts the waters of the Jordan River. You see, Elisha did not have to persuade the prophets or the people that he is the successor of Elijah, his actions speak for themselves and it shows that he is now the man!

I like what Spurgeon had to say regarding this. He wrote, “And when you have got their mantle, do not waste precious time in lamentations about them any more; *get to your business*. There is a river in your way; what then? Well, go to the Jordan as the prophet Elisha did, and try to pass it. Say not, ‘Where is Elijah?’ but ‘Where is the Lord God of Elijah?’ Elijah is gone, but his God is not; Elijah has gone away, but Jehovah is present, still.” It is not about the servants of God but it is about the God we serve. May we not lose sight of that!

VERSES 16-18

1. Now this seems strange to me for these prophets were the ones telling Elisha that his master, Elijah was going to be taken away and now that it has happened, it seems that they don't believe it. Thus, these young prophets want to go and search for Elijah, just in case he only went up part way and then came crashing down. They were concerned that he may be injured, lying on some mountain somewhere. Maybe the Lord just transported him to another location and thus, they want to go and find him. But Elisha refuses their request at first because Elisha knows exactly what has happened to Elijah, he was taken up into heaven and what Elisha saw, so did these prophets!

2. Now these young prophets are like many liberal seminary students today and many liberal Christians who do not believe in the Word of God. They pick and choose what they like and don't like. They add to God's Word to make it say what they want. Folk's, when God speaks about doing something, you don't need to fear that He will mess it up, or come up short. What God has said will come to pass. But many today are rejecting what God has said and are thus searching all kinds of dead ends just in case God may have messed up and forgotten to tell us all we need to know. What a waste of time and it is a very dangerous game to play.

Remember what Peter said in II Peter chapter 1, starting in verse 1, **“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** II Peter 1:1-4.

Now verses 2 through 4, these three verses are power packed. If we would only read them and apply them to our lives, truly believe them! Today people water down God’s Word or they negate it but look at the importance that Peter applies to it. First Peter tells us that grace and peace are increased or multiplied, how? As we know God. In other words we are more aware of the grace of God and we can enjoy the peace of God. And to know God is not just a casual acquaintance but it is an intimate knowledge of God, a relationship with Him! The more we spend time in God’s Word, in prayer, with other believers, the more we will understand His grace and His peace for our lives!

What do we need for spiritual life and for that matter, physical life? Folks, we need Jesus. Paul, in II Corinthians 9:8 makes that point as he says, **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”**

You see, it is not about how strong we are or the power we have, but it is all about the Lord empowering us for the work He has called us to do. Why do people buy so many self-help books? Because they don't believe Jesus is sufficient and they need to look elsewhere. How foolish that is when you think about it! Paul said in Colossians 2:8-10, **“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”**

We have seen God's grace extended to us as He empowers us and gives to us all we need to live. Not because we deserve it, but it is a gift of God to us. Now Peter tells us of the peace of God that is found in the precious promises of God to us. First, though, Paul tells us, **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”** Romans 5:1-2. Once we have made peace *WITH* God through Jesus Christ, then we enjoy the peace *OF* God.

Look at the promises that God has given to us in His Word and that knowledge should help us to live godly lives. That is what Paul said in II Timothy 3:16-17, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

Also, peace through the storms of life can be ours as we rest in His promises.

Paul, in Romans 15:4 put it this way, **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”** We do have all we need to succeed in this life if we have Jesus! But, if you lack the knowledge of Him, you will be swept away and thus, read His Word and apply it to your life and the pulls of this corrupt world will not have its grips on you! So don’t negate or add to or take away from God’s Word, read it and apply it to your life so you may grow. Don’t waste your time looking for things that are not there, that are not beneficial, but dig into God’s Word which is living and powerful and able to transform your life!

3. Now these young prophets don’t give up but they push the issue and so Elisha allows these 50 guys to go out looking for Elijah, and they don’t find him anywhere, even after a three-day search. Talk about a lot of wasted time and energy for what? For absolutely nothing!

4. Now don’t think that this is the end of Elijah’s ministry, for at the close of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6 says, **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”** So Elijah will be one of the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation chapter 11 that will minister during the Tribulation Period.

Now who is the other witness during this period of time? Some say the other witness is Enoch, for he too was taken up into heaven without dying. But I see Enoch as a type of the church, for before the judgment came, the flood, he was taken up or raptured into heaven. Then who is this other witness with Elijah during the Tribulation Period? I believe that Moses is the other witness spoken of in Revelation chapter 11. You see, Moses died and according to Deuteronomy 34:5-8, Moses was still in good health when he died and God buried him. Also, in Jude 9 we see Satan disputing over the body of Moses. And when you look at the miracles done by these two witnesses, they are similar to the miracles done by Elijah and Moses. Also, when you look at Matthew chapter 17, we not only see Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, but Moses also. Both their ministries were cut off, but they will complete them during the Tribulation Period as they witness of Christ to a lost world.

VERSES 19-22

1. The city of Jericho had a problem, which was magnified even more by being surrounded by a desert, and that problem was that the water was bad. In fact, some say that the water caused the cattle to miscarry, the fruit trees to be barren and even women to miscarry. Thus, they seek help from this prophet of God. And Elisha adds salt to the water and healed the water supply. And God did such a great job that you can go to Jericho today and the water supply is still fresh. In fact, the city of Jericho is now a beautiful oasis in the desert, at least it was when we were there several years ago, before it was occupied and controlled by the Palestinians!

2. Now how does this relate to us as Christians? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, **“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.”** The Living Bible puts this verse like this; **“You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.”**

Jesus used salt here because it was an illustration that the people could easily recognize and pick up on. The salt they used was gathered down by the Dead Sea or from small lakes that would dry up in the heat of summer on the edge of the Syrian Desert.

Now understand that this salt was not pure, like the salt we use today. It was contaminated with impurities like magnesia, lime, vegetable remains, and-so-on. And out of those various compounds, the salt or sodium chloride, was the most soluble and it washed out the easiest. Thus, you can still have this white substance that looks very much like salt but the problem was it did not taste nor act like salt, and thus, it was good for nothing. They would basically use it to throw down on the roads to be trampled under foot and keep the growth of vegetation down on the roads.

Now the first thing that salt does is it preserves or retards decay. You see, they had no refrigeration in those days, so when a animal was killed, a heavy layer of salt was placed over the meat to kill any surface bacteria and prevent the meat from rotting. Outside of Christ man is rotting in sin and so is this world. But as Christians, as salt, we are to have a preserving effect on the society we live in. Paul, in II Thessalonians tells us, **“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.”** II Thessalonians 2:7.

He is speaking of the Holy Spirit working in the life of the believer having a preserving force in this world, and that will continue on until the Lord comes and takes His bride, the Church home.

As we stand up for the things of God it should help point people in the right direction. But, as you look at this nation in which some 80% of the people call themselves Christians, if you can believe that number, we are not doing what we are called to do, be salt! We are seeing all kinds of immorality on the increase, pornography growing, and instead of going out and coming in contact with others, we try to toss our salt out hoping it will hit someone, and that is foolish. The salt needed to be rubbed into the meat and we must rub elbows, touch lives for our salt to affect others!

Another thing that salt does is it makes you thirsty. Have you ever had something that was really salty and then go and drink several glasses of water because the salt made you so thirsty? That is the idea here. Are you so in love with Jesus, is He such a part of your life, that as others see you they are thirsty to drink what you have - *JESUS*? That is what should happen! Too often people look at our lives and they see it as being sour and they don't want to drink what we have. If that is you, then that is not Jesus. I am not saying that every person you come in contact with will come to Jesus, but are we making people thirsty to know Jesus or are they turned off by our sour and bitter lives?

Lastly, salt has healing properties to it, and I also see that in a Christian's life. A person who is hurting you can show them the love of Jesus. Now, when salt comes in contact with a wound, it does burn, it does sting, it does hurt, but that is needed to awaken the person and to show them their need for the healing touch of Jesus.

Man continues to rot like dead meat, but as salt we are to preserve, we are to make them thirsty for Jesus, we are to bring the healing of Jesus to them. But, salt can lose its flavor and become good for nothing. You see, for the Christian to be effective, he must retain his Christ-likeness! If we become assimilated into the world, hang around the unsaved a majority of our time, we are going to become contaminated by the impurities of the world and thus, we will lose our influence!

It is as Dr. Lloyd-Jones says: “The glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first.” But, if we are not, we do become ineffective and useless. As Christians, we are to be the salt of the earth. You see, as we touch people’s lives, people who are poisoned and dying, we can heal them by sharing Christ with them, thus making their life fruitful.

3. As we conclude tonight we are going to look at a very controversial portion of Scripture, one the critics love to bring up, this brutal slaying of these young children. Let’s read on and see what is going on here.

VERSES 23-25

1. Now as you read this you might think this is unfair, 42 children mauled and probably killed because they were teasing Elisha? Think about that, young kids tease and make fun of people all the time, and because they made fun of this prophet, two female bears mauled 42 of them. First of all, these were not young children, but could be anywhere from teenagers to 40 years old. Secondly, if 42 were mauled, that meant this was a large crowd of these men and they were coming against Elisha and it could have gotten ugly for Elisha. Also, Elisha was a prophet of God and in mocking him they were mocking God. And they wanted Elisha to disappear like Elijah did, to get out of their life. And, as we have seen, God does not allow them to get away with this.

In fact, Matthew Poole had this to say regarding what these men were saying, “Go up; go up into heaven, whither thou pretendest that Elijah is gone. Why didst not thou accompany thy friend and master into heaven? Oh that the same Spirit would take thee up also, that thou mightest not trouble us nor our Israel, as Elijah did!” And think about this, Elisha was going to Bethel, the house of God and they were there trying to stop him. Thus, God intervenes and do you think anyone else tried to prevent Elisha from fulfilling the work that God had for him? Absolutely not!

2. Let me close this evening with these words from J. Vernon McGee. He wrote:

It is an awful thing for a preacher to deny the deity of Christ and the work He did at His first coming. It is a terrible thing to deny and ridicule the second coming of Christ. This brings a very severe judgment.

Notice that they called Elisha “bald head.” We do know something about this man: he had a bald head.

There is a great deal about judgment in the Word of God. We need, therefore, to get our facts squared away. When you understand what we are talking about in this section, there is nothing here that is out of line with the rest of Scripture. He pronounced a curse upon them. Elisha sounds like Elijah here. He also sounds like the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt. 11:21). He went on to say, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell . . .” (Matt. 11:23). That is judgment, friends.

We are living in a day when there is a great deal of pussy-footing in our legal system. The lack of the enforcement of law on the part of some judges is a scandal; it is responsible for the lawlessness on every hand. It is responsible for the shooting down of policemen. It is not safe to walk our streets any more. The minds of people in this country have been brainwashed. When are we going to wake up? When gangs of young hoodlums terrorize our neighborhoods, there should be punishment. I personally heard a leading attorney recently tell a small group, privately, that these young lawbreakers should be taken out and publicly whipped, as they used to do in the early days. He said if that were done it would break up a lot of the lawlessness. May I say to you that after the bears did their work, nobody else around Bethel ridiculed Elisha—you may be sure of that.

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru The Bible, Vol. II, p. 307