

The longsuffering and merciful LORD will not be ignored, mocked or resisted. Rebellion and apostasy will finally cultivate his settled wrath—unleashed on all who despise him (even kings, rulers, and spiritual leaders). Resist kindling his jealousy, and instead pursue life by fearing him alone and honoring his word.

Introduction – When I first learned I’d be preaching this text, the little boy in me laughed. Not so fast!

Background – The beginning of the book of 2 Kings, which is really Part 2 of the one book of Kings, continues the narrative of Israel’s unraveling as a kingdom. In 852 B.C. the nation is losing territory, losing social stability, and losing her religion—exchanging it all for the foolish pursuit of a false god.

I. **Doubtful Questions About the Story** (addressing defeater beliefs)

A. **Skeptical: Doesn’t it all seem supernaturally far-fetched? (vv. 3-4, 10, 12, 15)**

The first question is skeptical and based on a defeater belief, which if true, renders any contrary evidence unbelievable. In this case, the defeater belief is the impossibility of miracles. If you believe miracles cannot happen because the laws of science and regularity preclude them, then every miracle story will sound legendary. The logical problem with this doubt is it assumes the conclusion (the impossibility of the supernatural). Sound thinking should doubt the unexamined premise and let the Bible as a historical record speak for itself. Because if there is a God, then miracles are possible.

B. **Ethical: Do the punishments justly fit the crimes? (vv. 10, 12, 16-17)**

The second doubtful question is an ethical one, calling God’s moral character evil. Notice this doubt’s hidden assumption—that there is a standard of justice above God that judges him. The problem with this assumption is if God is God, then by definition he is the standard of justice. Yes, it is conceivable we’re morally superior to the God who exists. But that doesn’t explain the fact of sin and evil in human beings. It certainly cannot account for the life of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be God in the flesh, who was hated and killed by his enemies although they could accuse him of no evil.

II. **Hard Lessons From the LORD** (discerning uncomfortable truths about the God of Israel)

A. **God is deadly serious about the first and second commandments (vv. 2-4)**

Despite Yahweh the LORD God of Israel being always available, the king sends messengers to seek an encouraging word from a foreign god, Baal-zebub (the “lord of the flies”). Ahaziah’s choice of Baal-zebub is a wicked act of religious treason against Israel’s Savior. The God of Israel gave Ten Commandments to his people. The first (Ex 20:2-3; Jer 25:6; Hos 13:4; Acts 17:29-31). The second (Ex 20:4-6; cf. Dt 6:15; Col 3:5; Rev 21:8). No one wants to face the uncomfortable truth, this first hard lesson from the LORD, that God treats our worship with a deadly seriousness, and that we cannot as NT believers sweep this notion under the OT rug.

B. **God defends his witnesses by destroying their enemies (vv. 9-12)**

Elijah’s calling down divine fire from heaven to consume Ahaziah’s arrogant soldiers is just a particularly gory example of another uncomfortable truth about God. At this point someone may reply, “Don’t you remember a similar story in the Gospels?” (Lk 9:51-56; cf. Rev 11:5) In his first coming the enemies Jesus came to destroy were much bigger. Cosmic threats to his witnesses—sin, death, and Satan the prince of demons, Beelzebub himself. In his violent death on the cross and in his glorious resurrection, Jesus Christ accomplished salvation in the same way God has always saved his people. That is the second hard lesson from the LORD.

C. God will deliver on his threats to punish the wicked (vv. 17-18)

A laconic, morbid summary of the account—the narrator recounts only one story of Ahaziah’s reign, not how he lived but how he died. In the end, the king takes orders from the prophet, upending the pagan notion that prophets serve at the king’s bidding and privilege. In 852 B.C., Elijah’s prediction is fulfilled—proof of the authority of the LORD’s prophet over the king. Also king Ahaziah had no son—another proof of God’s judgment on his house. The third hard lesson is the uncomfortable truth that God will deliver on his threats to punish the wicked. But there is very good news that appears greater still against the backdrop of these three hard lessons about God.

III. Gospel Applications For Us (responding from positions of hostility or humility)

A. For those who do not fear the LORD

1. *Admit* sin is deeply entrenched in your heart (vv. 2, 9, 11, 13, 16). The Scriptures say the human heart is the absolute last place you should look for direction and to discern right from wrong (Jer 17:9-10). It does not matter if you’re a leader of rebellion like Ahaziah, or just going along as a follower like Captains One and Two and their squads of fifty men. They didn’t admit sin was deeply entrenched in their hearts, and their cocksure arrogant self-righteousness left them exposed to the only one they should fear—the God of Israel.

2. *Believe* that tenacious and severe mercy is God’s plan for your life (vv. 1-6). Next consider the circumstances in which God fiercely pursued those who did not fear him. God chose to do everything in the story because he is merciful, patient, and longsuffering with those who don’t fear him. That is God’s plan for your life. His severe love may bring lots of suffering into your life, but it may bring ease and worldly fulfillment that lull into the sleep of eternal death. Both will finally cultivate his settled wrath. You decide which is worse—pick your poison!

3. *Confess* your hostility and repent, and God will relent of his threats (15-16; cf. 1 Kgs 21:17-19, 27-28). You will only be saved from God’s wrath by imitating Captain Three—falling at the feet of the man of God and pleading his mercy. There is only one prophet, one man of God, who is alive and able to save—Jesus Christ (Phil 2:10-11; Acts 4:12). Instead of his settled wrath falling on sinners, when he died on the cross Jesus Christ turned God’s wrath away and took the punishment you deserve. God is totally satisfied with Jesus the man of God’s loving sacrifice.

B. For those who fear the LORD

1. *Expect* your reputation for godliness will invite opposition (vv. 7-9). Elijah feared God, but he dwelled in the wilderness and lived a sackcloth life. His godly character and life mission were opposed by all who did not fear the LORD. It is the same today for those who fear God (Jn 15:18-19). So get used to opposition and be content you are in good company. Better to be counted with Elijah, Jesus, and the apostles than with Ahaziah and the lord of the flies.

2. *Thank* God for humility because it will save your life (vv. 13-14). You know the humble are blessed with grace (Jas 4:6) and are exalted (Jas 4:10). But not so well known is that humility is a life-saver! Captain Three’s humility saved his life. Thank God for the gift of humility. Cultivate it in your thoughts, words, and actions. Spread it to others with prayers, kind words, and sacrificial works of service. The humble Savior was exalted forever, and all those who follow him will find life in this world and the next.

Conclusion – 3. *Do not fear* anyone because in Christ God will be with you (v. 15). Plenty of fear can be found in this story. There is plenty of fear today. Should I inquire elsewhere if God doesn’t seem to be much help? In Christ we don’t need to be afraid. He will be with us to save (Isa 35:4; 41:10; 43:2-3a). There is a God in Israel. His name is Jesus. Fear him and you’ll have nothing to fear.