

# 1 Kings 20:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.

## Analysis

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**And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.**

This verse contributes to the broader narrative of ahab's wars with syria, within the book's focus on prophetic ministry of Elijah confronting Baalism. The temple represents God's dwelling among His people and foreshadows Christ as Immanuel ('God with us').

The Hebrew text reveals nuances important for understanding this passage's contribution to 1 Kings' theological message about kingship, covenant, and faithfulness to Yahweh. This verse demonstrates the consequences when God's people—especially their leaders—either follow or forsake the covenant established at Sinai.

## Historical Context

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First Kings was written during or after the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE), reflecting on the monarchy period (10th-9th centuries BCE) to explain why the kingdoms fell. Elijah's ministry (c. 860-850 BCE) occurred during Ahab's reign, a time of intense spiritual crisis in Israel.

Ancient Near Eastern kingship ideology viewed kings as divine representatives responsible for maintaining cosmic order through right worship. Archaeological discoveries from sites like Megiddo, Hazor, and Samaria confirm the historical reliability of 1 Kings' descriptions of building projects and administrative structures.

## Related Passages

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**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does this passage illustrate the importance of complete obedience to God's word without compromise?
2. What does Elijah's ministry reveal about God's character and His commitment to His covenant people?
3. How does this verse point toward or prepare for the coming of Christ and His eternal kingdom?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיֹּאמֶר ו	אֵלָיו	עֲבָדָיו	הִנֵּה	נָא		
said	H413	And his servants	H2009	H4994		
H559		H5650				
	שָׁמָע עָנוּ	כִּי	מֶלֶךְ	בֵּית	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
unto him	Behold now we have heard	H3588	kings	of the house	of Israel	H3588
	H8085		H4428	H1004	H3478	
מֶלֶךְ	הֵם	נָשָׂא יָמָה	נָא	שָׁקֵן יָם	בְּמִתְּנֵי יָנוּ	
kings	are merciful	H1992	let us I pray thee put	H4994	sackcloth	on our loins
H4428	H2617		H7760		H8242	H4975
וְחִבְלֵי יָם	בְּרָאשׁ נֹו	וְנִצָּא	אֶל	מֶלֶךְ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אוֹלֵי י
and ropes	upon our heads	and go out	H413	kings	of Israel	H194
H2256	H7218	H3318		H4428	H3478	
	יִחְיֶה	אֶת	נַפְשְׁךָ:			
peradventure he will save	H853	thy life				
H2421		H5315				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Genesis 37:34** (Parallel theme): And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

**2 Samuel 3:31** (Kingdom): And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier.

**1 Kings 20:23** (Kingdom): And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.