

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

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

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

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

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

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו עֲבָדָיו הִנֵּה אַתָּה בְּיַד שְׁמָעָנָה
said H413 And his servants H2009 H4994
H559 H5650

בְּיַתְּמָם עַל שְׁמָעָנָה כִּי לְךָ מִלְּמָד בְּיַתְּמָם
unto him Behold now we have heard H3588 kings of the house of Israel H3588
H8085 H4428 H1004 H3478

בְּמִתְּמִתְּנָה יָנוּ שְׁקָדִים נָא שְׁקָדִים
kings are merciful H1992 let us I pray thee put H4994 sackcloth on our loins H4975
H4428 H2617 H7760 H8242 H4975

אֹלֵל יְהֹוָה לְמִלְּמָד בְּרָאשׁ כָּו יְחִילָל יִמְלָא
and ropes upon our heads and go out H413 kings of Israel H194
H2256 H7218 H3318 H4428 H3478 H194

בְּמִתְּמִתְּנָה אֶת נַפְשָׁךְ
peradventure he will save H853 thy life H5315

Additional Cross-References

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.