

2 Kings Chapter 3

Verses 1-3

“Jehoram” was the second “son of Ahab” to rule “Israel”.

He reigned from 852-841 B.C.

Although Jehoram “put away” the “sacred pillar”, a cultic object used in “Baal” worship, he was sympathetic to idolatry in Israel and continued the religious policies of his parents as well as his predecessor, “Jeroboam” (1 Kings 12:26-33; 13:33).

2 Kings 3:1 "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years."

“Jehoram” (see note on 1:17).

He was Ahaziah’s brother (1 Kings 22:51).

“Eighteenth year”:

Ca. 852 B.C.

This was Jehoshaphat of Judah’s 18th year of rule after the death of his father Asa (in 870 B.C.).

Jehoshaphat was co-regent with Asa from 873-870 B.C.

Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram was co-regent with his father from 853-848 B.C. (see notes on 1:17; 8:17).

“Twelve years”:

852-841 B.C.

2 Kings 3:2 " And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made."

“Image of Baal”:

This was probably an image of the god Baal that King Ahab had made and placed in the temple he built to Baal (1 Kings 16:32-33).

This image was only put in storage not permanently destroyed, because it reappeared at the end of Jehoram’s reign (10:26-27).

Jehoram was the last of the line of Ahab.

All of the kings of Israel were evil, and he was no exception.

He was not as evil as some of the others, however.

He did not do away with the golden calves, but he did stop the worship of Baal, by destroying the image of Baal.

It was, probably, the terrible end that came to Ahab and Ahaziah that caused him to tear the image of Baal down.

2 Kings 3:3 "Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom."

"Jeroboam":

Ca. 931-910 B.C. (see notes on 1 Kings 11:26 – 14:20; 2 Chron. 9:29 – 13:20).

"The sins of Jeroboam" involved the state religion that Jeroboam I had established as a rival to the true faith in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:26-33).

This is speaking of the calf worship.

It is strange, but they tried to worship God and these calves all at the same time.

It appears, the reason they kept the calf at Beth-el and the calf at Dan, was to keep the people from going to Jerusalem and worshipping at the temple.

Verses 4-5

The "Mesha" Stele (or Moabite Stone), is a witness to historical accuracy.

Found in Jordan (in 1868 and dating to about 840 B.C.), this inscribed stone provides King Mesha of Moab's description of how he was oppressed by Israel's King Omri.

2 Kings 3:4 "And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand rams, with the wool."

Mesha king of Moab":

According to the Moabite Stone (discovered at Dihon, Moab, in A.D. 1868 and dated to ca. 840-820 B.C.).

Moab, which is located east of the Dead sea between the Arnon River and the Brook Zered, had been Israel's vassal since Omri (ca. 880 B.C.).

Moab's king, Mesha, was a sheep breeder (Amos 1:1), who supplied the king of Israel with lambs and wool.

This was Moab's annual tribute to the Israelite king.

Now, we see the reason for the revolt of Moab.

The tribute Moab paid was excessive.

2 Kings 3:5 "But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel."

"Moab rebelled":

Mesha used Ahab's death as an opportunity to cast off the political domination of Israel with its heavy economic burden.

Moab's rebellion took place in 853 B.C. during the reign of Ahaziah (1:1).

Jehoram determined to put down Moab's rebellion upon his accession to Israel's throne in 852 B.C.

He mobilized Israel for war (verse 6), and asked Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in the battle (verse 7).

Confirmation of this event comes from the Moabite Stone set up by Mesha, "the king of Moab" (see the note on 1 Kings 16:27).

Moab did not fight Israel for their independence until after Ahab was dead, because Ahab was a very strong opponent.

He was also, very cruel, and might have wiped their people out to get their animals and other wealth.

2 Kings 3:6 "And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel."

"And numbered all Israel":

Who were fit to bear arms, got them together at some place, and mustered them, and prepared for a war with Moab, to reduce them.

This numbering was, possibly, taking stock, to see how many military they could muster in case of war.

Numbering the people without God's permission was forbidden.

2 Kings 3:7 "And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I [am] as thou [art], my people as thy people, [and] my horses as thy horses."

Family ties again brought "Jehoshaphat" into a military expedition (see the note on 1 Kings 22:4).

Jehoshaphat had made an agreement with Ahab, when he was still alive.

Jehoshaphat would help them, because of this earlier agreement, and because Moab was their mutual enemy.

2 Kings 3:8 "And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom."

"The wilderness of Edom":

This was the long and circuitous route by the lower bend of the Dead sea, the arid land in the great depression south of the sea known as the Arabah, or an area of marshes on Edom's western side.

According to the Moabite Stones (see note on 3:4), Mesha's army firmly controlled the northern approach into Moab.

Therefore, an attack from the south had a much better chance of success.

It was the most defenseless position and Mesha could not enlist help from the forces of Edom (verse 9).

One of the main reasons that Jehoshaphat chose this direction, was because Edom was a dependency of Judah, and would let them pass with no conflict.

Edom was an enemy of Moab, themselves, and some of their troops might join them in the battle.

Going by Edom was not the shortest route, but was probably the safest.

Verses 9-14

The biblical writer consistently refers to “the king of Israel” without naming him, perhaps to keep “Elisha” as the real focus of the narrative.

“Poured water on the hands of Elijah” denotes selfless service to another, which Elisha committed to (in 1 Kings 19:21).

2 Kings 3:9 "So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them."

Apparently, Jehoshaphat had gained the allegiance of the Edomites in the previous Trans-Jordanian war (2 Chron. Chapter 20).

In the last lesson, we mentioned the fact that Edom did not have a king.

They were ruled by a deputy that Jehoshaphat had set up.

It is interesting here, that they have gained enough strength that they now have a king.

It is also interesting, that they join the battle with Moab led by their king.

Israel's troops will be in the front lines, because this battle is really theirs.

Judah will back them up, and then the troops of Edom will back up Judah.

This was such a tremendous amount of troops, you can see it would be easy to run out of water.

This means they were travelling 7 days to get to the area of the battle.

2 Kings 3:10 "And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!"

Lamenting their sad case, as being desperate; and he was the more concerned, as he was the principal who had drawn the other kings into this affair, though he throws it upon the LORD and his providence.

"That the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab":

Into whose hands they must inevitably fall, if they could have no water to refresh them; since they would be so weak as not to be able to stand a battle with them, and be dispersed here and there in search of water, and so fall into their hands.

Extreme thirst is intolerable.

It is reported of Lysimachus, that he delivered himself and his army into the hands of the enemy for a draught of water.

Leo Africanus relates, that in the desert of Azaoad stand two marble pillars, testifying that a rich merchant bought of a carrier of wares a cup of water at the price of 10,000 ducats; but there not being water sufficient neither for the one nor the other, they both died of thirst.

The fear of the king of Israel, is because of what happened to Ahab and Ahaziah.

He realizes that it was not God who sent them to this war, but their own desire.

He fears the LORD will be angry with them and destroy Israel, Judah, and Edom.

2 Kings 3:11 "But Jehoshaphat said, [Is there] not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here [is] Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah."

Whatever Jehoshaphat's faults might have been in allowing himself to be drawn into dangerous circumstances, he was consistently concerned with spiritual things.

As on the previous occasion (1 Kings 22:7-28), so here he asks for a true "prophet" in order that the LORD's will may be known in the entire enterprise.

Whether "Elisha" was ministering in the area or had accompanied the military forces, as was often done in the ancient Near East, is uncertain.

"Poured water on the hands":

Probably derived from the custom of washing hands before and after meals.

The idiom meant that Elisha had personally served Elijah.

Jehoshaphat recognized that Elisha was a true prophet of the Lord (verse 12).

Notice, it is Jehoshaphat who calls for the prophet of God.

It appears, that everyone knew of the miracles Elijah had done.

They did not however, know much about Elisha, except that he served Elijah.

2 Kings 3:12 "And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him."

To give them an answer, which he concluded from his being a servant and disciple of Elijah, whom he succeeded in his office, and of whom he had, doubtless, heard.

And from his following the camp, and being in it, which he easily imagined was not to fight, but to assist by his advice and counsel.

And by his prophecies, as there might be occasion for them.

"So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him":

Descended from their chariots, and went to the tent in the camp where he was.

They did not send for him to come to them, but, in honor of him, went to him themselves.

Jehoshaphat knew that this man of God would be the one they needed to see.

Jehoshaphat, a man who did right in God's sight, was in very bad company with these two evil kings.

2 Kings 3:13 "And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

"What have I have to do with thee":

A Hebrew idiom that expressed the completely different perspective of two individuals (2 Sam. 16:10).

Elisha sarcastically ordered Jehoram to consult the prophets of his father Ahab, prophets of the northern kingdom's deviant religion (1 Kings 22:6; 10-12), and the prophets of his mother Jezebel, the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:19).

Elisha first reprimands Jehoram for his evil ways.

He reminds him that his father Ahab, and his mother, Jezebel, had brought the worship of Baal into the land.

Even though Jehoram had torn down the statue of Baal, he was still an evil king in the sight of the LORD.

Notice that Jehoram says, it was the LORD who brought these three together.

He is afraid the LORD will destroy them, as he did Ahab and Ahaziah.

2 Kings 3:14 "And Elisha said, [As] the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."

"Regard the presence":

Elisha agreed to seek word from the LORD because of his great respect for Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD (1 Kings 22:43).

The only thing Jehoshaphat did that was displeasing to the LORD, was the times he made alliance with the evil kings.

It appears, the LORD forgave him for that, because he was righteous in God's sight.

Elisha would not have even answered the kings of Israel and Edom, but will speak to Jehoshaphat.

Verses 15-19

Calling for a “musician” reflects one of the various ways God disclosed His word to His prophets, through music (1 Sam. 10:5), visions (Isa. 21:2; Dan. 1:17; 2:19), or personal reflection (Jer. 11:18-23).

2 Kings 3:15 "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him."

Elisha's call for a minstrel is not evidence that he was an ecstatic, as sometimes suggested.

Elisha was simply setting a proper atmosphere for spiritual things in the midst of dire conditions.

Music was an important part of Israel's spiritual experience, whether individually or in situations of formal religious worship.

“A minstrel”:

The music was used to accompany praise and prayer, which calmed the mind of the prophet that he might clearly hear the word of the LORD.

Music often accompanied prophecies in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 25:1).

Music definitely has a place in worship.

The beautiful spiritual songs in the church prepare our hearts to receive the message God has for His people.

This is the reason for the minstrel here.

Elisha will listen to the soft music, and get his mind off the world.

The music will have a calming influence.

Elisha would close out the world, and listen to the Word the LORD speaks through him.

2 Kings 3:16 "And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches."

"This valley":

Probably the northeast area of the Arabah, west of the highlands of Moab and southeast of the Dead sea (see verse 8).

We remember, they were out of water.

These ditches would hold water for them.

2 Kings 3:17 "For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts."

No rain was to fall where the Israelites and their enemies were encamped; there was not even to be that all but universal accompaniment of rain in the East, a sudden rise of wind (compare 1 Kings 18:45; Psalm 147:18; Matt. 7:25).

"Cattle, and your beasts":

The former are the animals brought for food.

The latter are the baggage animals.

We are not told where the water comes from, but we can assume that the water flows into these ditches from another spot.

It may rain heavy in another place, and flow the water into the ditches.

It is not important how the ditches are filled with water.

It is a miracle from God.

2 Kings 3:18 "And this is [but] a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." Elisha explains that filling these ditches with water is a minor miracle. The great miracle that will take place here, will be the Moabite defeat by the Lord. He will deliver the Moabites into their hands.

To give them such a plenty of water in such an extraordinary manner: he would do for them what was greater, not only save them from falling into the hand of Moab, which they feared.

"But he wilt deliver the Moabites into your hands":

Which was more than was asked for, or expected.

2 Kings 3:19 "And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones."

These wartime directions go beyond the normal limits allowable in battle situations (Deut. 20:19-20).

These four points of “attack” on both natural and human resources would not only defeat the Moabites in the moment but disable them long-term.

This is not a commandment to do these things, but rather prophetically speaking of what they would do.

The Moabites were not living for God.

This is speaking of a total destruction of the land, which would have to be rebuilt.

Verses 20-25

Events unfolded as Elisha predicted (3:16-19), proving him a true prophet of God.

To “deliver the Moabites into Israel’s hand” was indeed “a simple matter” for the LORD (3:18).

But no one would have imagined that God would use the blood-like reflection of the “sun” on the “water” to do so.

Kir-hareseth” was the capital of Moab (Isa. 16:7).

2 Kings 3:20 "And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."

“Meat offering”:

This was offered daily (see Exodus 29:38-41).

“Came water by the way of Edom”:

Divinely created flash floods from the mountains of Edom caused water to flow in the direction of the Dead sea.

This water was caught in the canals that had been built in the valley (verse 16).

The early morning was the time of the morning sacrifice.

It appears, there had been heavy rain in Edom, and the water flowed into the ditches from there.

2 Kings 3:21 "And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armor, and upward, and stood in the border."

The kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom.

"They gathered all that were able to put on armor, and upward":

That were of an age capable of that, and all who were more grown; or "girt on a girdle", a military one, with which the sword was girt, who were at age to wear and knew how to wield a sword.

"And stood in the border":

Of their land, between Edom and them, to defend themselves and their country against these invaders.

It seemed, that the Moabites had gathered all the men of the land who were old enough to fight, and gave them armor.

They quickly covered the border, where the enemy was coming from.

2 Kings 3:22 "And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side [as] red as blood:"

Water ... red as blood":

As the Moabites looked down at the unfamiliar water in the ditches dug in the valley below them, the combination of the sun's rays and the red sandstone terrain gave the water a reddish color, like pools of blood.

Unaccustomed to water being in those places and having heard no storm (see verse 17), the Moabites thought that the coalition of kings had slaughtered each other (verse 23), and so went after the spoils.

The coalition army led by Israel defeated the Moabites, who had been delivered into their hands by the LORD (see verses 18, 24).

2 Kings 3:23 "And they said, This [is] blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil."

They were very confident of it, having no notion of water, there having been no rain for some time; and perhaps it was not usual to see water at any time in this place.

"The kings are surely slain":

They and their forces.

"And they have smitten one another":

Having quarreled either about their religion, or about want of water, and the distress they were come into through it, laying the blame of their coming out to war.

Or of their coming that way, on one another; and the Moabites might rather think something of this kind had happened, from what had lately been done among themselves, and their allies (2 Chron. 20:23).

"Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil":

Having no occasion to fight, or prepare for it; all they had to do was to march directly to the enemy's camp, and plunder it.

It appears, these ditches did more than supply water to them.

The ditches, possibly, had red clay at the bottom, and the water on it caused it to appear to be blood.

It could also have been a sunrise of redness that caused the water to look red.

They knew that Israel had broken away from Judah, and they thought some of the rivalry between them had sprung up in battle.

They want to believe these three kings and their men had turned on each other.

They want it so badly, they had convinced themselves that is what happened.

2 Kings 3:24 "And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in [their] country."

Not in an orderly regular manner, in rank and file, as an army should march, but in a confused manner, everyone striving who should get there first, and have the largest share of the booty.

"The Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them":

Being prepared for them, they fell upon them sword in hand, and soon obliged them to flee.

"But they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country":

They pursued them closely, and slew them as they fled, and followed them not only to their borders, but into their own country.

Though Schultens, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, renders the passage, "and they blunted their swords in it (in that slaughter), even by smiting the Moabites".

The Moabites had run in on Israel expecting to take a spoil, and instead, the Israelites killed many, and the others retreated.

The Israelites did not stop the battle when the Moabites ran. They followed them into their land to destroy them.

2 Kings 3:25 "And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about [it], and smote it."

"Kir-haraseth":

The coalition army invaded Moab and besieged its capital city, Kir-haraseth, located about 11 miles east of the Dead sea and about 20 miles northeast of the Arabah.

We see the prophecy of Elisha fulfilled here.

They went through the land destroying everything in sight.

The good trees are trees that are useful to the people living there.

They could even be speaking of fruit trees.

Kir-haraseth was a fortress, and could not be broken down without the heavier rams and such. This is possibly, why it was not immediately torn down.

The battering rams and the catapults, which threw large stones at them, tore it down.

2 Kings 3:26 "And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through [even] unto the king of Edom: but they could not."

"The king of Moab" probably decided to fight the Edomite forces because of Edom's lesser forces and to punish "Edom" for siding with the allied Israelite armies.

The king saw that they were all about to die.

The king takes his strongest and bravest men, who had probably, been his personal guard, and tried to break through into the ranks of Edom, but they could not.

Kings 3:27 "Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him [for] a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to [their own] land."

“His eldest son ... offered him”:

In desperate hope for intervention by his idol god, Mesha sacrificed his oldest son to the Moabite god Chemosh.

This was done in plain view of everyone inside and outside the city in an attempt to induce Chemosh to deliver the Moabites from disastrous defeat.

“Great indignation against Israel”:

It seems best to understand that the king’s sacrifice inspired the Moabites to hate Israel more and fight more intensely.

This fierceness perhaps led Israel to believe that Chemosh was fighting for the Moabites.

Thus, the indignation or fury came from the Moabites.

Despite Israel’s success (3:24-25), the Moabites rallied and forced Israel to return home without complete victory.

God graciously meets the needs of His people, but He will not be coerced, manipulated, or used by those who, like Jehoram, do not obey Him.

The Moabite king’s desperate sacrifice of his “son” is often paralleled in the literature of the ancient Near East.

This verse provides an instance where the Bible supplements the information from secular history (i.e., the Moabite Stone).

The Israelites left the scene with disgust at what they saw.

In Moab, the eldest son of the ruler who died, would take the throne.

The rule over the land was handed down from father to son.

Human sacrifice was offered by the heathen people who surrounded Israel and Judah.

The sacrifice was of his eldest son, because he was the most precious to him.

This human sacrifice would have been an abomination to God.

It would also have been revolting to the Israelites and those of Judah.

It was certainly revolting to the people of Moab.

This drastic step so shocked everyone that the war ended.

Israel, Judah, and Edom went home.

2 Kings Chapter 3 Questions

1. Who became king of Israel at the death of Ahaziah?
2. How many years did he reign?
3. How was his evil reign different from that of Ahab and Jezebel?
4. What was the sin of Jeroboam mentioned in verse 3?
5. Why had they kept the golden calf at Bethel and at Dan?
6. Who was king of Moab at this time?
7. How did they make their living?
8. When did Moab revolt against Israel?
9. What did Jehoram do to prepare for war?
10. Who did he send to for help?
11. Was he willing to help him against Moab?
12. Why was Jehoshaphat willing to help fight Moab?
13. Who chose the direction of attack?
14. Why did he choose this way, since it was not the shortest?
15. What suddenly comes to the king of Israel about the LORD?
16. Who asks if there is a prophet to consult?
17. Who did one of the servants recommend?
18. How did Jehoshaphat show confidence in the prophet?
19. Who did Elisha tell the king of Israel he should inquire of?
20. Who was the only reason Elisha would speak to them?

21. Who did Elisha ask for?
22. What is the benefit of soft spiritual music in church?
23. What did Elisha tell them to do?
24. What would the LORD do for them in this battle?
25. In verse 19, what did Elisha tell them they would do?
26. When did the water come into the ditches?
27. Who fought for Moab?
28. When the Moabites saw the ditches of water, what did they believe they were?
29. Who attacked first?
30. What did the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom do, that fulfilled the prophecy of Elisha?
31. What did the king of Moab try to do with 700 of his choicest men?
32. What terrible thing did he do, when his plan of attack failed?
33. What effect did this have on everyone?