

## 2 Kings 3: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ]     2 Kings chapter 3 In the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twelve years.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, though not like his father and mother, for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he clung to the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He did not depart from it.

Now Meshach king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and he had to deliver to the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But when Ahab died the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

So king Jehoram marched out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel, and he went and sent word to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to battle against Moab?

And he said, I will go. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses. Then he said, By which way shall we march?

[ 1 : 03 ]     Jehoram answered, By the way of the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and when they had made a circuitous march of seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals that followed them.

Then the king of Israel said, Alas, the Lord has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there no prophet of the Lord here through whom we may inquire of the Lord?

Then one of the king of Israel's servants answered, Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah. 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. And Elisha said to the king of Israel, What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother.

But the king of Israel said to him, No, it is the Lord who has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you.

[ 2 : 08 ]     But now bring me a musician. And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus says the Lord, I will make this dry streambed full of pools.

For thus says the Lord, You will not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals. This is a light thing in the sight of the Lord.

He will also give the Moabites into your hand. And you shall attack every fortified city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop up all springs of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones.

The next morning, about the time of offering the sacrifice, behold, water came from the direction of Edom, till the country was filled with water. When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to put on armor, from the youngest to the oldest, were called out, and were drawn up at the border.

And when they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, the Moabites saw the water opposite them as red as blood. And they said, This is blood, the kings have surely fought together, and struck one another down.

[ 3 : 17 ] Now then, Moab, to the spoil. But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose and struck the Moabites, till they fled before them. And they went forward, striking the Moabites as they went.

And they overthrew the cities. And on every good piece of land, every man threw a stone until it was covered. They stopped every spring of water, and felled all the good trees, till only its stones were left in Kir Harasheth.

And the slingers surrounded and attacked it. When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom.

But they could not. Then he took his oldest son, who was to reign in his place, and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel. And they withdrew from him, and returned to their own land.

2 Kings chapter 3 rejoins the narrative of the kings, after the succession narrative of Elijah and Elisha in chapters 1 and 2. Jehoram comes to the throne in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat of Judah.

[ 4 : 18 ] In chapter 1 verse 17, we're told that he became king in the second year of Jehoram king of Judah. In chapter 8 verse 16, we're told that Jehoram became king of Judah in the fifth year of Jehoram of Israel.

How are we to make sense of these seemingly conflicting details? There is a rather simple explanation. Toward the end of the reign of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram of Judah reigned alongside his father for seven years.

His sole reign only began in the fifth year of Jehoram of Israel. Jehoram of Israel is the son of Ahab, the brother of Ahaziah, his predecessor on the throne.

The typical statement that you would find concerning the reign of the king is found here, near the beginning of Jehoram's reign, rather than at its untimely end a few chapters later, where it would interrupt the narrative flow.

Jehoram of Israel is a king who does evil. Even though his sin is mitigated relative to the evil of Ahab and Jezebel, his father and mother, he makes some minimal gestures towards faithfulness to the Lord by putting away the pillar of Baal that Ahab had set up.

[ 5 : 21 ] Nevertheless, he continued in the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, presumably the idolatrous worship of the golden calves. This was a breaking of the second commandment, whereas the pillar of Baal was a breaking of the first.

The first verse of 2 Kings tells us about the rebellion of Moab against Israel. The narrative thread was left hanging, and we have to wait for chapter 3 for it to be taken up again.

Moab was subjugated as a tributary kingdom by David, an event recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 8 verse 2. Since that point, Israel had dominated Moab, first as a united kingdom under David and Solomon, and then as the northern kingdom of Israel.

At this point, Moab rises up, causing trouble both for Israel and Judah, Judah being the lesser part in the alliance between the two kingdoms. This is something we see in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, where the Moabites attack Jehoshaphat with the Ammonites and the Meunites.

Jehoram of Israel calls upon Jehoshaphat to join him. Jehoshaphat of Judah was likely in a marriage covenant with Israel at this point, as his son Jehoram, who would later become Jehoram of Judah, had married Athaliah, a granddaughter of Amri.

[ 6 : 30 ] It's important that we don't mix up our Jehorams. The Jehoram in the northern kingdom of Israel is the last of the Amri kings. The Jehoram in the southern kingdom is the successor of Jehoshaphat his father, and for some time co-regent.

That there are Jehorams on the thrones of the northern and the southern kingdom at the same time suggests that these two nations are being twinned in many ways. They're becoming too close through their alliances.

The consequences of this too close joining will be seen in the events around the story of Jehu, and then later on in the devastation that Athaliah wreaks in the southern kingdom.

We should also observe the way that the pattern of events that we see in 1 Kings chapter 22 is being repeated in many senses in this chapter, in verses 4 and 5 of that chapter. Much the same sort of thing will happen here.

Once again there will be a misleading prophecy, and an unfavourable but inconclusive result of the battle. The battle against the Syrians in chapter 22 of 1 Kings had ended badly for Israel and Judah.

[ 7 : 44 ] King Ahab had been killed in that conflict, but now the two nations join together once again to fight in a similar manner. Edom is a vassal kingdom of Judah, and it joins them as they go south to the Dead Sea, through the wilderness of Edom.

They hope to surprise the Moabites to their east. It's possible that they take this more circuitous route, because the crossing near Jericho may be controlled by the Moabites. However, taking this route through the wilderness, there is no water.

Jehoram of Israel suggests that the Lord might have called out the three kings, in order to give them as a weakened force into the hand of Moab. As in 1 Kings chapter 22 though, Jehoshaphat desires the counsel of a prophet of the Lord, and he's directed to Elisha by one of Jehoram of Israel's servants.

The three kings go to consult with Elisha, who presumably is with the army at this point, perhaps as one enjoying at least a semi-official role. Elisha's reception of Jehoram of Israel, however, is cold.

He says that he should go to one of the prophets of his father and mother. As a very surprising detail here, he summons a musician to help him in his process of prophesying. Prophecy in scripture often has a poetic or lyrical quality.

[ 8 : 52 ] Perhaps we're supposed to think that he sung part of this. It would certainly be appropriate for the spirit's association with the glory of speech and the transformation of speech into song.

1 Samuel chapter 10 verses 5 to 6 is another part of scripture where we see some sort of relationship between prophecy and music. Likewise in the case of David, and perhaps also in the singers who are associated with the temple.

Perhaps the connection between prophecy and music, as John O'Hearn observes, is found in the way that music can open us up to things beyond ourselves. In Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18, Paul speaks about not getting drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but being filled with the spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

While condemning intoxication and drunkenness, the scripture speaks about the way in which we can open ourselves up to God through song. Music is something that can catch us up and carry us along.

It can place us into different emotional states, and it can also be the sort of spirit that binds together people in a crowd. Music then would seem to have a fitting correspondence with prophecy.

- [ 10 : 04 ] Elisha's desire for a musician might be for someone to help him to open up, to adopt the right spiritual posture, to receive the word of God. The spirit is, as it were, the music of God, which is one reason why it is so important that we give thought to fitting music that should accompany our worship of God, to open us up to him and to his presence.

The word of the Lord comes through Elisha, and he promises that he will make the dry streambed full of pools. This will occur apart from wind and rain, and it will provide all that the company need to drink, both them and their animals.

The provision of such water in the wilderness might remind us of Exodus narratives. And beyond that, he's going to give the Moabites into their hand. The prophecy ends with the statement that they will attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop up all springs of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones.

That last part of the prophecy is particularly surprising, as elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 20, verses 19-20. We are told that they should not do these things. When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them.

You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you until it falls.

- [ 11 : 31 ] The cutting down of trees was only for a limited purpose, for the purpose of getting wood for siege works. Beyond that, they were supposed to leave the land alone. They were expressly forbidden to spoil the land.

And yet, here in the prophecy of Elisha, this is exactly what we are told that they will do. It might make us scratch our heads and wonder what's going on. As we've seen the Lord use prophecy to deceive and mislead people to their doom, people who are wicked and reject his word, perhaps we are seeing that happen again here.

Back in 1 Kings chapter 13, the man of God from Judah was misled by the old prophet from Bethel. By heeding his lying prophecy, and not adhering to the word that the Lord had given to him directly, he ended up being killed by a lion.

In 1 Kings chapter 22, the Lord had put a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets, and Micaiah had to alert him to it. The Lord is shrewd with the wicked, and people who reject his word will find themselves coming to ruin.

The next morning, the Lord's promise of water comes to pass. The whole country is filled with water that comes from the direction of Edom, and the Moabites hear, too late, that all the kings have come to fight against them, and they scramble to get their army together.

- [ 12 : 42 ] They look out early in the morning, and the sun shines on the water, and they see the water as red with blood. The fact that they see the water as red with blood as the sun rises up, would suggest that the three kings of their enemies are camped to their east.

Edom, Israel, and Judah have come all the way around, and are attacking them from the direction that they least expected. However, to the Moabites, the water that looks like blood is proof that their enemies have been defeated.

They must go up and gather the spoil. Water turning to blood might also make us think of the story of the Exodus. When they come to the camp of the Israelites, the Lord's promise that he would give the Moabites into their hand comes to pass.

The Moabites are caught unawares, and the Israelites and Judahites and Edomites pursue them, destroying everything in their path. They lay the land in its city's waste until the king of Moab holds up in Kir Harashath.

Desperate, not knowing what to do, he sacrifices his son for a burnt offering on the wall, presumably as a sacrifice to his god Chemosh. All human stratagems had failed for Misha, the king of the Moabites, and now he turns to his god.

[ 13 : 48 ] And most surprising of all, at this point, great wrath comes upon Israel. Where does this great wrath come from? Is it the Moabites being spurred up against them by this action? Probably not.

Nor is it likely to be the wrath of Chemosh, who is called the filth of the Moabites elsewhere in 1 Kings. The wrath in question is almost certainly from the Lord, which leaves us with the question of how the wrath of the Lord relates to this sacrifice.

Why, for instance, would the Lord strike out at Israel, rather than against Moab? It seems most likely to me that what is happening is that they are brought to the point where it seems absolutely certain that they will win.

And then at that point, the Lord springs his trap. The king of Moab has desperately tried his last plans. He has tried to break through with the 700 men, and then he has sacrificed his son.

And now, on the very brink of victory, the entire tide of the battle turns. As in chapter 22 of 1 Kings, they return to their own land, and the battle is inconclusive. Israel, Judah, and Edom have been disobeying the word of the Lord, disobeying the word of the Lord concerning the manner of battle, perhaps also disobeying the word of the Lord in trying to control Moab at all.

[ 14 : 56 ] In Deuteronomy chapter 2 verse 9 we read, And the Lord said to me, Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ard to the people of Lot for a possession.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that we might see a sort of perverted Exodus narrative in the case of Misha. Misha has a name that might remind us of Moses, as his name means salvation, he might also remind us of Joshua.

His sacrifice of his firstborn son maybe reminds us of the story of the Passover. The Exodus themes that we saw to this point, which may have seemed to the reader to have foretold a defeat of the Moabites by Israel, may actually foreshadow a very different result.

A question to consider, what insights into God's character and the ways that he deals with people might we draw from this chapter?■■■■■