

## 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS

### Week 4, chapter 3

Beginning in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings Chapter 2, the beginning of the end of the Prophet Elijah's reign as the highest and chief prophet among the many prophets of Israel and Judah was commenced. **Eliyahu** (Elijah), Elisha's former master, who had been mysteriously removed from earth by God in a storm wind, had overseen the era when the Spirit of Prophecy in Israel seems to have been at its peak; but upon his disappearance that same spirit began a rapid decline.

Even so, Elisha held nearly as much power and authority and closeness to Yehoveh as did his former master. In fact we found out in Chapter 2 that the Lord had granted Elisha a "double-portion" of the prophetic gifting, and it was validated by means of Elisha being able to observe God's fiery horses and chariots coming for Elijah, and Elijah's going-up into the heavens (something that was in-the-spirit and which no one else possessed the ability to see). And so these next several chapters will chronicle a sampling of the many miracles, and will record a selection of the many oracles, that God worked through His anointed prophet Elisha.

But chapter 3 (the subject of today's lesson) is a departure from this theme. Elisha is only briefly mentioned and the focus is instead is on the rebellion of the nation of Moab against Israel, and the war that it set off with Moab on one side and a coalition force of Israel, Judah, and Edom on the other.

This would be a good time to recall that at this point in history, when Israel is spoken of it is referring ONLY to the northern tribal territories, generally situated north of Jerusalem, which consisted of 10 of the 12 tribes of Jacob. And I'd like to point out that just as it was with **Eliyahu**, Elisha's mission field was nearly exclusively Israel and NOT Judah. The reason for this is simple: Judah was generally staying faithful to Yehoveh while Israel had fallen into nearly complete apostasy and idolatry (except for a handful of scattered pockets of faithful Yehoveh worshippers). Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was in full operation, and the Priesthood still ministered to God, the Temple, and the people of Judah. Sacrifices continued unabated. The kings of Judah remained, to varying degrees, loyal to Yehoveh and to His Torah, even if it was far less than pure worship and obedience to God's Laws was usually tempered by political expediencies.

So what we find is that the Lord has established a pattern that the more God's people are oppressed, and the more the Spirit of evil (what today we might call the Spirit of the Anti-Christ)

comes upon the earth, God responds in mercy with a counter weight of some sort; but the counter weight is always only for a time then it is removed. In the era of the **Shofetim** (the judges), during a time when Israel was only a loose confederation of Hebrew tribes and clans and not yet a sovereign nation, the Lord would send deliverers (called Judges) to deal with the several foreign oppressors making life difficult on the 12 tribes, but it was accomplished on a tribe by tribe, case by case, basis.

In the era of kings, after the United Kingdom of Israel dissolved into two rival kingdoms upon Solomon's death, the northern kingdom immediately made a strong turn towards idolatry and an oppression of its own people. This is when we start hearing of Elijah, and of the many thriving prophet guilds consisting of thousands of godly prophets who banded together and lived in prophet colonies in several of the larger cities of the north. These prophet guilds of God were, of themselves, a divinely ordained counter weight to the thousands of prophets of the government sanctioned prophet guilds of Ba'al that Queen Jezebel introduced to Israel. This was the means that Yehoveh used to keep the truth of His Word alive in the northern kingdom at a time when political and social pressures demanded that worship of God be abandoned or at least considered to be no better than the worship of other gods (which were to be recognized as legitimate gods and they were to be respected).

However as we will soon see in the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, God does not have limitless patience with His people. And His taking of Elijah marked that moment when God's patience had reached its maximum and from here on, in a slow descent, God would begin to remove that Spirit of Prophecy that had been the vehicle of keeping His Word alive among those who still wanted it, because the number of those who still wanted it was diminishing. At some breaking point, when the number of faithful became too few and the apostasy of Israel's kings and the general population became too extreme and entrenched, God used but a few men as prophets and their purpose was mainly to pronounce a warning of the coming doom over the Kingdom of Israel as God's punishment for their unfaithfulness.

Let's read 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings Chapter 3 together.

### **READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS CHAPTER 3 all**

This chapter opens by driving a stake in the ground to give us a sense of the timing of Moab's rebellion against Israel. And, as with both books of the Kings, the timing (the dating) is given in relation to which king was ruling. But because there were separate independent monarchies operating (one in Judah, another in Israel), then we are also given the timing in the form of synchronizing the reign of a king of Israel in relation to a king of Judah. Confusing for us, but more than sufficient detail for an ancient people who fully understood how this system worked

and what it meant to convey.

And, wouldn't you just know it, the timing given in verse 1 doesn't seem to match with the timing given in an earlier chapter about these same kings. Here's the situation: **Y'horam**, son of King Achav and Queen Jezebel, and therefore the brother of King **Achazyah** (same parents) was now king over Israel (the northern tribes); and this was because **Achazyah** had died of injuries from accidentally falling out of 2<sup>nd</sup> story window. The problem with the timing is this: we're told that **Y'horam** became King of Israel in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoshaphat's reign as King of Judah. But back in chapter 1, verses 17 and 18, we're told that **Y'horam** became King of Israel in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of King Jehoshaphat's SON.....who was also named **Y'horam**. So, which is correct? Did **Y'horam** of Israel become king during Jehoshaphat's reign, or was it 2 years AFTER Jehoshaphat's reign when his son was now ruling?

Surprisingly, there is no discrepancy here. Many months ago we discussed how it was common among Middle Eastern kings, including Israel and Judah, to have a kingship that was a co-regency. In other words, two kings would be sharing the same throne simultaneously. This generally happened (but not always) when the current king became too elderly, or ill, or incapacitated and so he named his son as a successor and he was immediately installed. Sometimes the current king was so determined that a specific son become his successor that he didn't want to take any chances of any kind of political intrigue or hanky-panky happening upon his death, and so ensconced the favored son as king during his lifetime. The son was immediately coronated, but the father did not step down. Rather we now had a senior king (the father) and a junior king (the son) ruling co-operatively. This arrangement is what scholars call a co-regency, and that is what explains away this seeming discrepancy.

So in fact Jehoshaphat and his son **Y'horam** were ruling Judah together; and the editor chose in chapter 3 to use King Jehoshaphat's name as the mark in time, while he chose in chapter 1 to use Jehoshaphat's son's name (**Y'horam**) as the mark in time. Again, for us confusing. But for an ancient people who were completely familiar with such arrangements, they knew instantly what these references meant. In fact what I just told you about Jehoshaphat and his son reigning together is outright stated in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 8:16 (I'm using the KJV because the CJB translation of this passage is a poor one and is inaccurate):

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Kings 8:16** *And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.*

Verse 2 goes on to explain that **Y'horam** King of Israel (remember, this is a different **Y'horam** than the one who is ruling in a co-regency with his father Jehoshaphat in Judah) was a very

evil king, but in God's eyes wasn't QUITE as bad as his parents, Ahab and Jezebel. For one thing, **Y'horam** took it upon himself to remove a pillar (a religious monument) that had been erected in honor of Ba'al, **Y'horam's** mother's patron god. On the other hand he retained the Golden Calf gods of King Jeroboam, and verse 3 seems to indicate he honored the cult of the Golden Calves and didn't deviate from whatever had been set up before his reign began. The reason for doing this would have been the same as for the originator of these graven images: it was all about money and politics.

Recall that it worried Jeroboam that his people would journey to the Temple in Jerusalem, there to be ministered by the Levite Priesthood. This all happened in Judah, and the people who served at the Temple were loyal to Judah. Not only that, enormous amounts of livestock and produce and other wealth would have been taken from the economy of Israel to deposit at the Temple in Judah, as sacrifices, firstfruits offerings, vow and peace offerings, and so forth. So Jeroboam set up his own graven images in a temple (2 of them so that it would be convenient for his people), set up an alternate priesthood, set up his own prophets, and then barred his people from journeying to Jerusalem under the rationale that there was no further reason to make the arduous trip.

Why would the Lord see removing the pillar to Ba'al as preferable to retaining the Golden Calf idols? Probably because Ba'al was another god, a rival god. But the Golden Calves were actually graven images of Yehoveh. So to worship Ba'al was to abandon worship of Yehoveh, but to worship the Golden Calf images was to break the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment of Yehoveh, but at least Yehoveh was still seen as Israel's God. I wish I knew exactly where the Lord drew these lines as to better and worse. But perhaps there's a larger principle here that is more easily defined. It is that despite the generally accepted modern Christian view that all sins are the same in God's eyes (that intentionally giving someone the wrong change at the lunch counter is no different than armed robbery of a bank because they are both sins) there are in fact greater and lesser sins. And it's not as easily clear cut as shoplifting as compared to cold blooded murder. Here in this passage the sin of creating a graven image of Yehoveh is explicitly said to be seen by the Lord as evil, but not quite as bad as worshipping a different god altogether.

As we move along in the Book of Kings we'll see that while **Y'horam** made some modest efforts to tamp-down Ba'al worship, he didn't succeed. And no wonder; his mother Jezebel was still alive and obviously still held much sway and power over Israel and wasn't about to have the god of her family (she was from Sidon), who was Ba'al, be removed.

Now that the timing is set, we get to the meat of chapter 3, the rebellion of King Mesha of Moab against Israel. We're told that Mesha was a herdsman; this simply means that Moab's economy was centered on the raising of flocks and herds and indeed the famous tableland of Moab was near perfect for this endeavor. Since the time of King David, Moab was under Israel's control as a vassal state. The tribute (the taxes) that Moab was required to pay to the

monarchy of Israel as the terms of this vassal relationship was 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 sheep annually! One can imagine that this was quite a burden on the Moabite society, and it must have rankled every one of Moab's kings for the last 150 years.

But another thing to notice is that Moab was NOT under Judah's control; only Israel's. So why would King **Y'horam** of Israel seek to convince King Jehoshaphat of Judah and his co-regent son, that they ought to join him in putting down the rebellion? Why would Judah want to get involved? Quite simple: a few years earlier Moab had attacked Judah. In 2Chronicles 20 we read about Moab coming against Judah, causing great damage and many casualties (even though ultimately losing), and Jehoshaphat wanted retribution.

<sup>CJB</sup> **2 Chronicles 20:1** *Some time later, the people of Mo'av and the people of 'Amon with other 'Amonim came up to fight Y'hoshafat.*

<sup>2</sup> *Y'hoshafat was told, "A huge army from beyond the [Dead] Sea, from Aram, is on its way to fight you; right now they are in Hatzatzon-Tamar" (that is, 'Ein-Gedi).*

<sup>3</sup> *Y'hoshafat was frightened, so he determined to seek ADONAI. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Y'hudah, <sup>4</sup> and Y'hudah assembled to seek help from ADONAI; they came from all the cities of Y'hudah to seek ADONAI.*

So once Jehoshaphat was on board, the next step was the plan of attack and it was decided that they would attack Moab not from the north (that was the easier route and that went through the fertile and valuable part of Moab), but rather from the south. This was mostly desert wilderness. And since battles were waged in the seasons when there wasn't rain and cold weather, and since the rainy season was late fall, winter and the beginning of spring, then this military expedition would have occurred in the late spring or early summer. It was going to be dry but also very hot. The availability of water was going to be crucial. No doubt Mesha would never have expected an attack from the south for all of these reasons and more.

Further by going through Edom to get to Moab, with the proper application of political pressure and a promise of a substantial portion of the war booty, the king of Edom would have good reason to ally with Israel and Judah. Not only would he be disposed to allow Israel and Judah's soldiers to pass through his nation, but also would contribute to the war effort. Edom was in a weakening vassal relationship with Judah at this time and not far from regaining its independence. In fact, depending on which writer of the Bible you are reading, they term the head of the Edomite government as either a king or a commissioner. For a long while Judah had put their own man in charge of Edom, but now it seems probable that a more typical king/vassal relationship was in operation with a man from a proper Edomite aristocratic family

now running the country and being termed a “king”. But of course, this king was still beholden to the King of Judah to some degree.

The route they took was a good strategic choice, but it went around the southern end of the Dead Sea and then turned northeast, all through miles of desert terrain. Verse 4 says that the army marched for 7 days but unexpectedly found no water. In those days, very little water could be transported with them. It was simply too heavy and unwieldy to carry and so they went to known places along the way where water was usually present. However in this case, the sources were dry and they were now in great danger. So in verse 10 **Y'horam** King of Israel is said to have exclaimed, “Alas!” in the sense of “this is terrible!” And he wonders if Yehoveh has brought all 3 armies here simply to be weakened from thirst and made ripe for the taking by Moab’s forces.

Interestingly Jehoshaphat King of Judah had a different mindset, because he had a different heart. It’s not that he wasn’t concerned and worried, but rather than essentially blame God for their predicament (as had the King of Israel), he immediately decided that what was needed was to consult Yehoveh for help and a solution. In earlier times, before the United Kingdom of Israel split, Levite priests would have been the medium through which God was consulted. But over the last several decades Prophets had taken a much larger role (almost exclusively so in the northern kingdom) and so Jehoshaphat asks **Y'horam** if there isn’t a prophet of YHWH nearby?

One of the King’s court says that there is a prophet of YHWH that can be reached, and his name is Elisha, the one who “poured water on the hands of Elijah”. In other words, Elisha was a student servant of his former master Elijah. Now it is easily imagined that of ALL the possible prophets that could be consulted, the last one on earth that the King of Israel wanted to be involved was Elisha. He would have been well taught by **Eliyahu** to have no regard for Israel’s kings. In fact Elijah had been considered as a trouble maker, if not outright enemy of the Kings of Ephraim/Israel. Of course Jehoshaphat knew of Elisha and his reputation as being steadfast for Yehoveh, and decided he’d be the perfect consultant. It is interesting to me that these 3 kings did NOT summon Elisha to be brought to them; it is said that they went to him. No doubt they remembered what happened to the 2 groups of 50 soldiers that had been sent to arrest Elijah and were instead burned up like toast. Where ever Elisha was it had to be nearby considering the dire straights they were in, without water.

And when they approach Elisha I just wonder if we can picture the King of Israel taking one look at the Prophet knowing that this isn’t going to go well for him; and Elisha doesn’t disappoint. He sneers at the King of Israel and wonders why he’d be interested in hearing from a true prophet when he has all of his mother’s “yes men’ prophets to consult. The insulted King replied that essentially since this was Yehoveh’s army, that as much as he hated to do it, it was a prophet of Yehoveh that would have to be consulted. Elisha responds that he will consult Yehoveh but ONLY for King Jehoshaphat’s sake.

Then Elisha orders a musician to be brought to him! There's been lots of interesting opinions on why he'd call for a musician, but I think there's no real mystery to this. The music was not meant as part of the ritual to consult God. Rather it is that Elisha was upset and needed to be soothed so that he could be in the proper spirit to communicate with the Lord; they didn't have aspirin or tranquilizers in those days. I think it is similar to the way music is used in the Church. It is at least partly meant to create a mood of reverence and to help set aside other cares and concerns that might be dominating our thoughts. It can be a real and needed aid to calm and relax us. King David was famous for regularly using music for just such a purpose. And it had its desired effect as he was now able to open up his own spirit to hear God's.

So it is now that we see one of the main reasons that this matter of the rebellion of King Mesha of Moab was inserted here by the editor of the Book of Kings. It is to bear witness to yet another miracle of God brought about through His prophet Elisha. The Lord is going to bring water to the soldiers of the coalition army to save them.

Now what may sound like some strange ritual of digging trenches and then an otherwise impossible miracle of filling them up with water from nowhere is what is being contemplated here is not the case. Just as God most often uses the natural things of His Creation to serve His purposes, He does so here. Just as in Egypt when Yehoveh used frogs, lice, boils, and all manner of things that occurs rationally and cyclically, He also orders them to happen upon His control and command, and sometimes with a ferocity that transcends anything normal. Thus the plan is that first water reservoirs will be dug, and then God will cause them to be filled. How does that happen, especially when it seems that rainwater won't be the source because verse 17 says that neither wind nor rain will be seen? Actually, it will be because of a flashflood.

The place that they are to dig these water-catching trenches is in a Wadi; a dry riverbed. At the high end of the riverbed, usually miles away, are mountains. And what happens is that it rains on these barren mountains of rock, the run-off gathers together into a rushing torrent at the bottom of the mountain, and quickly flows down the Wadis. I can tell you that this is a dangerous and common occurrence in Israel that unaware hikers walking in a Wadi are suddenly, without warning and under a cloudless sky, caught up and swept away by a fast moving flash flood. It is because the source of the water is far enough away that the thunderstorm that has drenched the mountain source of the water isn't even visible.

Then in verse 18 the Lord says through Elisha that while this miracle of life saving water is going to seem like such an awesome thing, in fact it is really trivial because God's intent is for Israel's troops to not only survive but to go and defeat Moab. And the Lord says that He will hand Moab over to Israel. This is not merely a glib saying or customary bible-speak. And although Moab is an arch enemy of Israel, a seemingly merciless attack of retribution is not the aim.

This is an important piece of information because when the Lord orders a war against an enemy of Israel and says He will deliver the victory, then this becomes a Holy War. And now that we understand that this is a Holy War, the next couple of verses are more understandable because essentially the coalition army is instructed not just to defeat Moab but to do it via a scorched earth campaign. They are to destroy everything they encounter along the way; they are to level every Moabite walled city, cut down every good tree (meaning trees that bear fruit), fill up all the water wells with rocks and dirt, and clutter up all the fields with rocks so that they become unusable. Why? Again, because it's Holy War. And the rules of engagement for Holy War are that since Yehoveh is the Warrior leader who defeats the enemy, all the spoils of war are His alone. It all becomes His holy property. And since we are talking about physical booty being turned over to a God who is spirit, the standard way this is accomplished is by destroying it, burning up what can be burned, and thus taking any possible use of the spoils out of the hands of men. This is according the Law of Herem, the Law of the Ban.

Verse 20 says the appearance of water happened exactly as Elisha foretold it and that it occurred in the morning at the time of Minchah prayers. This is not meant to say that they were doing sacrificing and prayer out in the desert wilderness. Rather it is just a means to describe the time of day using a common reference that Hebrews would understand.

But while all this was happening some Moabite scouts and lookouts stationed around the borders of Moab spotted the large enemy forces, informed Mesha, and then Moab's army was ordered to rush to meet the Israelite army at their southern border. But at first light as the Moabites were dispersed unseen in the hills above where the Israelite army was camped, some soldiers noticed what looked like huge pools of blood off in the distance next to the Israelite tents. The reddish soil that had become mixed up with the turbulent waters had taken on a blood-red tinge and the Moabite soldiers and commanders assumed that it actually was blood, and that the coalition army had turned on itself and a slaughter had ensued. Delighted, they rushed down the hills to pounce on the wounded and diminished soldiers only to find out it had all been an optical illusion.

It is a valuable principle that all Believers need to learn: God can use anything for both curse and blessing. For God's people, the sudden appearance of water was a life-saving blessing, but for God's enemy, the Moabites, the same water proved to be a fatal curse.

The Israelite soldiers fought them, and the surprised army of Moab fled with the Israelites in hot pursuit. Along the way the troops did as Yehoveh instructed and destroyed everything in sight. Finally they pushed what was left of Mesha's retreating army into a walled city and surrounded it. Mesha knew he couldn't hold out long in a siege and so took 700 men and tried to break out.

The plan was to break out in the direction of the Edomite troops, and to kill the Edomite king.

Then they would have a route of escape. The reason they chose Edom was that they figured Israel wouldn't be so anxious to rescue these foreigner Edomites at the cost of Israelite blood. Likely he also figured the Edomite army the least likely to fight hard to win what was really an Israelite war. Mesha failed in his attempt and retreated back into the stronghold. But now Mesha was desperate and cornered.

In the last few verses we have a difficult passage to translate and so there have been a handful of different opinions on how to explain what occurred. I think that the one that makes the most sense is this one: while Mesha was unsuccessful in killing the Edomite King, he was able to capture his son. And so he took him hostage hoping to bargain for his own life. However when that didn't work (why would Israel's kings care if Mesha murdered the Edomite King's son?), Mesha did something absolutely barbarian. He took the young hostage to the top of the fortress walls and in clear view made a burnt offering of him to Chemosh, the God of Moab.

The loss of the Edomite crown prince crushed the Edomite king and demoralized his army. And to make matters worse the armies of Israel and Judah didn't help them to protect the Edomite King's son or fight to get him back. The Edomites had only come in support of Israel and Judah, but now they were done; grief stricken and angry they abandoned the battlefield for home. The Israelites depended on the Edomites for supplies and for logistical support and with the Edomites gone now they were left exposed and far away from the safety of Israelite soil. So they gathered themselves together, disengaged, and went home.

This horrible act of human sacrifice was well remembered in Israel's history and denounced by the Prophet Amos in the Book of Amos 2:1.

**CJB Amos 2:1 Here is what ADONAI says: "For Mo'av's three crimes, no, four- I will not reverse it- because he burned the bones of the king of Edom, turning them into lime;**

And this verse I think further validates my position that the person killed on the walls of that fortress was the Edomite King's son, and that is why the battle quickly fell apart thereafter.

Let me end with this thought: it was a terrible mistake on Israel's part to break off the fighting and go home without victory; in fact it was sin. It was no strategic victory for Mesha to merely kill one man, even though he was the son of the Edomite King. The reality is that the kings of Israel and Judah refused to claim the victory of God's Holy War. The reality is that when they saw the sacrifice of the young man to Chemosh, it unnerved them. Why? Because they completely believed that Chemosh was real; and when the heathen Edomites left for home the Israelites attributed Moab's success to Moab's formidable god who had just received the

human sacrifice.

If ONLY they would have believed God. If ONLY they could get it straight in their minds that there is no Chemosh; there are no other gods. And that when God promises victory all that is left is for them.....and us.....to be obedient for that victory to go from prediction to accomplished fact.

We'll begin chapter 4 next time.