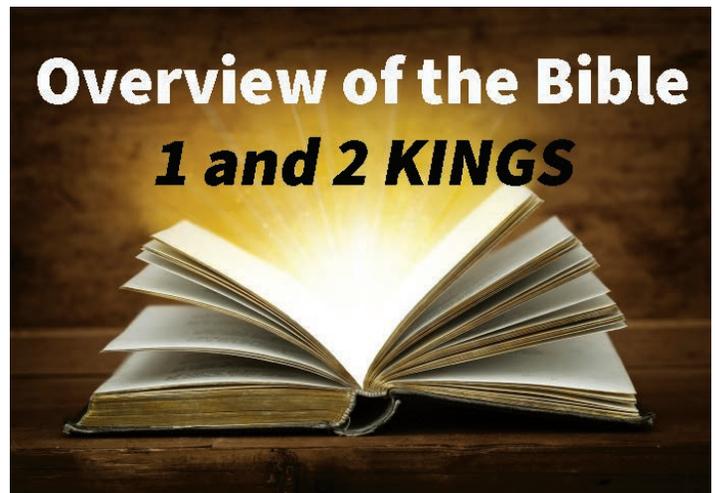


2 Kings 3-4

Lesson 107

Wednesday, October 26, 2022



JEHORAM'S WICKEDNESS (3:1–3)

3:1–3. **Jehoram (Joram)** was the second **son of Ahab** to rule **Israel**. In the **18th year** after **Jehoshaphat** began reigning as sole **king of Judah**, **Jehoram (Joram) became king** over Israel and ... **reigned 12 years** (852–841 B.C.). Though wicked, he was less **evil** than his **father Ahab** and his **mother Jezebel**. **The sacred stone of Baal ... made** by Ahab, was evidently an image of that god. Though Joram did get **rid of** this idol he remained sympathetic to and supportive of Baal worship in **Israel** (cf. 10:19–28). For some reason he removed this important image, but continued the religious policies of his parents and his predecessor **Jeroboam** (cf. 1 Kings 12:26–33; 13:33).

3. ELISHA'S MINISTRY (3:4–8:15)

The great ministry of Elisha, already begun and revealed in part, is recorded in this large section of stories.

a. THE BATTLE AGAINST MOAB (3:4–27)

3:4–8. The Moabites **raised** many **sheep**. When Omri subjugated **Moab** he imposed a tribute of **lambs and ... wool** which the Moabites grudgingly provided for many years. When **Ahab died** in battle, **Mesha** the Moabite **king ... rebelled against ... King Ahaziah** (1:1). This rebellion seems to have been ineffective since Mesha also rebelled against Ahaziah's successor, Joram (3:4–27). Eager to suppress this uprising **Joram ... mobilized all ... Israel**. Seeking permission to march through Judah to fight Moab from the south, Joram asked **Jehoshaphat of Judah** to join him as an ally in battle. Jehoshaphat agreed and pledged his support to Joram. Joram suggested attacking from the south **through the Desert of Edom** rather than from the north, the more normal though heavily defended frontier, and Jehoshaphat agreed.

3:9–12. **Edom** at this time was under Judah's authority and joined the alliance. After marching through Judah down the southwestern coast of the Dead Sea, around the southern end, and into Edom, **the army** ran out of **water**. Joram's expression of dismay (v. 10) indicates that he considered **the LORD** responsible for their predicament. As on an earlier occasion (1 Kings 22:7) **Jehoshaphat** suggested they find a **prophet of the LORD** who could obtain instructions for them. One of Joram's officers volunteered that **Elisha** was nearby. Probably the Lord had directed him there to be ready for this mission; it is unlikely that he was traveling with the army. Pouring **water on the hands** of another for washing was a servant's work; Elisha had been Elijah's minister (cf. 1 Kings 19:21). Evidently the officer thought Joram did not know Elisha, which may have been the case. Whether Joram knew of Elisha or not, **Jehoshaphat** did. Humbling themselves before the prophet, the three kings paid him a visit.

3:13–19. Elisha's question; **What do we have to do with each other?** is probably an idiom meaning "Why should I obey you?" The prophet's suggestion that Joram go to his parents' **prophets** implies that since the king promoted Baal worship, he should seek his own god. This barb forced Joram to face up to the impotency of Baal. Joram's rejoinder placed the blame for the army's predicament on **the LORD**. He had come to Elisha because now it was up to Yahweh to get them out of their trouble.

Elisha was not intimidated by Joram's charge. He knew God had not directed Israel into its difficulty but that the army was there on the king's initiative. Nevertheless, for Jehoshaphat's sake **Elisha** consented to seek a word from the Lord. (His words; **As surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve**) are strikingly similar to Elijah's words to Joram's father Ahab (1 Kings 17:1; cf. 2 Kings 5:16). Harp music helped put **Elisha** into a frame of mind in which he could readily discern the Lord's direction. (David's harp-playing also helped soothe Saul, 1 Sam. 16:23.)

Elisha received a direct revelation and proceeded to explain God's plan. The **valley** was probably the valley of the Zered on Moab's southern boundary. God would provide **water** enough in an unnatural way so that everyone would know that it was He who had provided. This would be **an easy thing in the Lord's eyes**. Ultimate victory would be theirs. Cutting **down** all the **good** trees would make it difficult for the Moabites to have fruit to eat and would mean they would have little shade. Stopping **up all the springs** would limit the Moabites' water supply and putting large **stones** in the fields would retard cultivation and lessen their productivity.

3:20–25. Evidently God caused the **water** from rains in **Edom** to flow down into the valley and fill the trenches that had been dug. This **water** was an expression of God’s love for His people. The fact that it had not rained locally probably caused **the Moabites** to think that having water in the valley was impossible. The **morning ... sacrifice** included a lamb and a grain and drink offering (Ex. 29:38–43).

The border where **the Moabites** were stationed **early in the morning** was the boundary between Moab and Edom east and south of the Dead Sea. Not expecting water, the Moabites assumed that **the water** shining in the sunlight was **blood**. So, the Moabite army erroneously concluded that the Israelites, Judahites, and Edomites had a falling out and had **slaughtered each other**—not an unrealistic possibility. Rather than advancing with weapons drawn for battle they ran to **plunder** the “dead” soldiers’ armor and weaponry. **But** instead, they ran into the waiting ranks of their enemies. Defenseless, **the Moabites ... fled before the Israelites. The Israelites**, and presumably their allies with them, **invaded** Moab, **slaughtered** the people, **destroyed** many **towns**, and did to the fields, **springs**, and trees what God had instructed (cf. 2 Kings 3:19). But **Kir-Hareseth**, the major city, could not be taken. It was situated at the end of a valley and successfully resisted the attacks of the stone slingers surrounding it.

3:26–27. The city of Kir-Hareseth (v. 25) was King Mesha’s refuge. Courageously he assembled **700 swordsmen**, broke out of the city, and attacked **the king of Edom**, whom he apparently concluded was the weakest link in the three-nation alliance. He was not successful, however, and was forced back behind the walls. Defeat in battle was regarded by pagans Near Eastern warriors as a sign that their gods were angry with them. To propitiate his god, Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7, 33; 2 Kings 23:13), Mesha offered **his firstborn son**, the heir to his throne, **as a human sacrifice on top of the city wall**. He was fighting with all his might. It was not Israel’s intent to annihilate the Moabites; they only wanted to keep their neighbors from rebelling against their sovereignty to keep them under their control. So offensive to the allies was Mesha’s act of sacrificing his son that **they withdrew and returned** home. Israel had won the battle even though they had not destroyed Kir-Hareseth or captured Mesha.

Some say **the fury against Israel**, which **was great**, may refer to God’s anger. More likely it refers to Judah’s anger against Israel for invading Moab in a battle that resulted in their seeing such a repulsive act.

A remarkable archeological discovery, the Moabite Stone, contains Mesha’s own record of this battle and other battles with Israel. On this stone the Moabite king claimed to have been delivered from the Israelites by his god Chemosh on this day. Though it is true that he was not captured at Kir-Hareseth and the Israelites withdrew, Israel and her allies were the real victors in this campaign.

The account of this battle provides further proof of the sovereignty of Yahweh and of the complete vanity of idols and idolatry. But even with so many proofs Israel continued to spurn the Lord and foolishly worshiped pagan deities.¹

THE OIL FOR THE PROPHET’S WIDOW (4:1–7)

4:1. The place where this incident took place is not stated but probably the widow lived in one of the cities where the schools of the prophets were situated, perhaps Bethel, Gilgal, or Jericho. Since the prophet had a **wife**, it is clear that **the company of the prophets** was not a monastic settlement (or settlements) of celibates. This widow turned **to Elisha** for help in her hour of need. She appealed to him on the basis that her **husband** had been faithful to the Lord (**he revered the Lord**). The taking of **boys as ... slaves** in payment for debts was not uncommon in the ancient Near East.

4:2–7. **Elisha** was eager to **help** the widow. His miracles, as contrasted with Elijah’s, frequently involved meeting the needs of individuals. Her **little** bit of **oil** was olive oil used for food and fuel. **Elisha** told her to collect **empty jars**; they would be

filled with oil God would provide. The widow’s faith can be “measured” by the number of **jars** she collected in response to the prophet’s instructions. Shutting **the door** provided privacy for the task of pouring the **oil**. Not everyone was to see the miracle take place; only the widow **and her sons**, the direct beneficiaries of God’s grace, should see it. But later she probably told all her friends about God’s miraculous provision. God provided oil enough to fill **all the jars** the woman had collected, all she felt she needed. She returned to Elisha with a report of the miracle, and he told her to **sell the oil and pay her debts**. There was enough money **left** over for her to **live on** after all her financial obligations had been met. Elisha is called a **man of God**, a term used of several prophets in 1 and 2 Kings (cf. comments on 1:9).

This story demonstrates God’s care for His faithful ones who lived in apostate Israel at this time. Widows were always vulnerable, and the widow of a prophet would have been even more needy. Yet God miraculously cared for this faithful, dependent believer.

c. THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN (4:8–37)

God’s concern for women and their special needs can be seen clearly in both the preceding and this incident. Whereas women were regarded as inferior to men in most ancient Near Eastern societies, God showed His concern for them here as well as in many other portions of Scripture.

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “2 Kings,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 542–544.

(1) THE LORD'S GIFT (4:8–16).

4:8–10. In contrast with the poor widow in the previous story this **woman in Shunem** (near Jezreel) was **well-to-do** and had a **husband**. **Elisha** evidently **stopped** at her house regularly at her invitation as he traveled between Samaria, Jezreel, and other cities. The woman's faith in Yahweh is seen in her desire to be a blessing to the **man of God**. Apparently, she was more spiritually sensitive and outgoing than her husband (cf. comments on v. 23). He did, however, consent to his wife's proposal to build a guest **room on the** typically flat **roof** of their house and to furnish it for Elisha's comfort.

4:11–13. After **Elisha** had enjoyed this couple's hospitality for some time, he desired to do something for them in return. He asked **his servant Gehazi** to express his offer to the woman. Perhaps this was to make the woman feel more inclined to ask for something than she would have if the prophet addressed her. God's grace to His faithful ones can be seen in Elisha's offer (v. 13; cf. v. 2). Elisha obviously enjoyed a position of some influence in the palace even though he opposed Joram's religious policies. The woman's reply (**I have a home among my own people**) expressed contentment with her lot in life; she was at peace and felt no special needs.

4:14–16. Determined to return her favors, **Elisha** discussed with **Gehazi** after she left his room what he might do **for her**. Gehazi observed that **she had no son** and probably never would have one since **her husband was old**. **Elisha** called **her** back and told **her** that she would have **a son in about a year**. This miraculous birth would be God's gift to her for her goodness to His servant. The woman's response to this announcement does not mean that she did not want a son; every Israelite woman did. To be childless was regarded in Israel as a great personal tragedy. Her reply indicates that she felt having a son was impossible. She urged Elisha not to build up her hopes only to disappoint her later.

(2) THE CHILD'S BIRTH AND DEATH.

4:17–23. Like Sarah (cf. Gen. 18:12–13; 21:2) the Shunammite did bear **a son** as God promised. However, one morning while **the child**, evidently still quite young, was out in the fields with **his father** in the heat of harvesttime a violent headache overtook him. He was carried back **to his mother** but failed to improve and **died** shortly thereafter, perhaps from sunstroke. Clearly the lad was dead, not just sick (cf. 2 Kings 4:32), and his mother knew it. Her thoughts turned immediately to Elisha, and she prepared to seek his help. Perhaps she did not tell **her husband** that her son had died because she feared he would not let her go if he knew the boy was dead. When she told him she wanted to see Elisha (**the man of God**; cf. vv. 9, 16, 21, 25 [twice], 27 [twice]), he questioned the need since it was **not the New Moon or the Sabbath**, occasions for religious festivals. The husband's spiritual concerns seem to have been superficial and ritualistic. Her words, **It's all right** (v. 23), were designed to avoid further explanation and delay.

(3) THE MOTHER'S PLEA (4:24–31).

4:24–26. Quickly the woman rode her **donkey**, while **her servant** led. Elisha was only a few miles away **at Mount Carmel**. Interestingly she knew where to find him. **When** the prophet **saw her** coming, he sent **Gehazi** to intercept her. But she would not be delayed with explanations; she hurried on to Elisha. Her confidence lay in Elisha's ability as a **man of God**, not in **his servant**.

4:27–28. Arriving where Elisha was, **she** grasped **his feet**, a gesture indicating extreme humility, need, and desperation. **Gehazi** felt that her behavior was improper, but Elisha recognized it as the expression of deepest grief. **The LORD** sometimes informed his prophets beforehand of situations they would face (e.g., 1 Kings 14:5), but this time He did not. As is common under extreme stress the woman's first words to Elisha did not tell him why she had come but how she felt about what had happened. She referred to the fact that having **a son** who died was a loss of her **hopes**, much like never having a son at all. She was so heartbroken at her son's death that at the moment she felt it would have been better if he had never been born.

4:29–31. **Elisha** probably understood that the lad had died; he probably would not have done anything without first learning what had happened. He sent **Gehazi** with his **staff**, the symbol of his authority as a prophet of the Lord and instructed him to **lay it on the boy's face**. Either Elisha believed God would honor this method or he wanted to teach a lesson. Gehazi was to go immediately to Shunem; he was **not to greet** anyone he met on the way or return their greetings. (People in the East lost much time giving and returning prolonged greetings.) The **mother** told Elisha that she would **not leave** him. (Cf. comments on words similar to; **As surely as the LORD lives**, in 1 Kings 17:1. That same and similar phrases occur seven times in 1 Kings and seven in 2 Kings.)

So Elisha **got up** and **followed her** back to Shunem. **Gehazi went on ahead** of Elisha who apparently followed his servant at a slower pace. Gehazi followed Elisha's instructions, but **the boy** did not awaken to life. **So Gehazi** returned to his master and reported what had happened.

(4) THE PROPHET'S MIRACLE (4:32–37).

4:32–35. That **the boy** was indeed **dead** is stated again (cf. v. 20). **Elisha.... shut the door** of the room so that he could concentrate in prayer on the object of his petition, while Gehazi and the woman stayed outside the room. The earnestness of Elisha's entreaty **to the LORD** is reflected in his prone posture. **The boy's body grew warm** from contact with Elisha; God was beginning to answer the prophet's prayer.

Elisha then paced **back and forth in the room**, apparently continuing to pour out his soul in fervent, persistent prayer. He returned to prostrate himself on the body of the lad **once** again. These actions were not some kind of magic; they were the natural physical expressions of a man engaged in earnest prayer. God restored the lad's life, air returned to his lungs, he **sneezed seven times** (seven indicating a work of God; cf. 5:14) and **opened his eyes**. These were the first signs that God had restored his life.

4:36–37. Then the prophet told **Gehazi** to **call the Shunammite**, who also was probably praying in some private place. **When she** entered the room and saw her son alive, she first **fell at Elisha's feet** out of respect and gratitude (cf. v. 27) and **bowed to the ground** before the Lord in worship. **Then she took her son**, probably in her arms, and left the room full of joy and gratitude for what God had done for her.

Throughout this story evidence of the woman's faith keep shining through (cf. vv. 8–10, 16, 21–22, 24–25, 27, 30, 37). God rewarded her trust with a miraculous birth and a miraculous restoration to life. Gehazi's failure to restore the boy to life by using Elisha's staff shows that the living God works in response to the requests of trusting people rather than magically through a fetish (Elisha's staff). Baal, a god of fertility, undoubtedly suffered ignominy as this story of Yahweh's provision of life circulated in Israel (cf. 1 Kings 17:21–22).

d. THE DEADLY STEW (4:38–41)

4:38–41. On one of Elisha's trips to **the company of the prophets** located at **Gilgal** a situation developed that provided an object lesson of what **Elisha** was teaching. The fact that this incident took place in a time of **famine** is important to a correct understanding of the story. This famine may have been the same one(s) referred to later (6:25; 7:4; 8:1) or a different one (cf. the famine in Elijah's days, 1 Kings 18:2). (These stories of Elisha's ministry are evidently not in strict chronological order but were arranged by the writer in sequence for a variety of reasons: similar subject matter, related lessons, geographical connections, etc.) Though there was a famine Elisha prepared to feed the prophets with whatever could be collected. He asked **his servant** (Gehazi or another person) to prepare the **stew** pot for a meal.

One of the prophets went out ... to gather whatever he could find growing wild to put in the stew. Finding a **wild vine, he gathered some of its gourds.... cut them up**, and put them **into the pot**. The unknown gourds had a horrible taste and may have caused some violent physical reactions in those who tasted **the stew**. The prophets concluded that the gourds had poisoned the stew. **Elisha** added some **flour** to the stew. Not much of it could have been available in a famine. But with this additive the stew became quite palatable, and the prophets ate it without harm.

In Elisha's day a spiritual famine had resulted from the people's turning from God and His Law. The people were hungry spiritually. In an effort to satisfy their need they had imbibed a false religion called Baalism. It looked harmless enough but proved disgusting and deadly. God's prophets helped counteract the deadly effects of Baalism in Israel.

e. THE MULTIPLICATION OF BREAD (4:42–44)

4:42–44. **Baal Shalishah** was a town close to Gilgal so this incident may have taken place about the same time as the preceding one. Evidently the famine still persisted. The **man** who brought the **bread** and **grain to the man of God** (Elisha; cf. v. 21) was apparently a believer in the Lord, taking these items as the first fruits offering of his harvest to God (cf. Num. 18:13; Deut. 18:4). When **Elisha** suggested to **his servant** (Gehazi) that the food be given to feed the **100 men** assembled (probably the company of the prophets; cf. 2 Kings 4:38), the servant's response indicated that it was far too little. Nevertheless, **Elisha** ordered him to distribute it and assured him that **the LORD** had promised there would be plenty and **some** would be **left over**. The servant obeyed and God multiplied the food as He had promised.

This miracle instructed all who heard of it that God could multiply the limited resources (cf. 1 Kings 17:7–16) that were dedicated to Him and with them nourish and sustain a large multitude. Baal, a god of fertility known as "the lord of the earth," had no such power.²

² Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 544–546.