

SECOND KINGS

Chapter 3

Moab Revolts

Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years.² He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made.³ Nevertheless he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them.⁴ Now Mesha king of Moab raised sheep, and he had to supply the king of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams.⁵ But after Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.⁶ So at that time King Joram set out from Samaria and mobilized all Israel.⁷ He also sent this message to Jehoshaphat king of Judah: “The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?” “I will go with you,” he replied. “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”⁸ “By what route shall we attack?” he asked. “Through the Desert of Edom,” he answered.⁹ So the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them.¹⁰ “What!” exclaimed the king of Israel. “Has the LORD called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab?”¹¹ But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?” An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.”¹² 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.¹³ Elisha said to the king of Israel, “What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother.” “No,” the king of Israel answered, “because it was the LORD who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab.”¹⁴ Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you.¹⁵ But now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha¹⁶ and he said, “This is what the LORD says: Make this valley full of ditches.¹⁷ For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink.¹⁸ This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD; he will also hand Moab over to you.¹⁹ You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones.”²⁰ The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was—water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.²¹ Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border.²²

When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red—like blood.²³ “That’s blood!” they said. “Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder, Moab!”²⁴ But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites.²⁵ They destroyed the towns, and each man threw a stone on every good field until it was covered. They stopped up all the springs and cut down every good tree. Only Kir Hareseth was left with its stones in place, but men armed with slings surrounded it and attacked it as well.²⁶ When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed.²⁷ Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.

Ch 3 Jehoram’s succession to the throne after the death of his brother Ahaziah is followed in ch 2 by the story of the ascension of Elijah and the beginning of Elisha’s ministry. Ch 3 tells the story of King Jehoram’s participation in an ill-fated campaign against Moab. The report of his death appears in ch 9. (TLSB)

3:1 *Joram son of Ahab became king ... in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat.* See note on 1:17. (CSB)

Jehoshaphat. Ruled 873–848 BC. *Jehoram.* Record of his reign is interrupted at several points. (TLSB)

twelve years. 852–841 B.C. (CSB)

3:2 *not as his father and mother had done.* Not as Ahab (see notes on 1Ki 16:30–34) and Jezebel (see 1Ki 18:4; 19:1–2; 21:7–15). (CSB)

sacred stone of Baal that his father had made. Apparently a reference to the stone representation of the male deity (see note on 1Ki 14:23) that Ahab placed in the temple he had constructed for Jezebel in Samaria (see 1Ki 16:32–33). From 10:27 it appears that this stone was later reinstated, perhaps by Jezebel. (CSB)

Probably a massebah stone with a relief carving of the chief Canaanite god on the front. (TLSB)

3:3 *sins of Jeroboam ... he had caused Israel to commit.* See note on 1Ki 14:16. (CSB)

3:4 *Mesha king of Moab.* See note on 1:1. (CSB)

Back in 2 Samuel 8:2 we learned that David had conquered the land of Moab. For 150 years the people of Moab paid tributes to David, to Solomon, and then to the kings of Israel. The land of Moab east of the Dead Sea was suited for raising cattle. (PBC)

Notes from 2 Samuel 8:2 - - The Moabites were descendants of Lot. Relations with Moab had at times been strained, but as a rule Moab had not been hostile toward Israel. Recall, too, that David's ancestress Ruth was a Moabitess (Ruth 4:21-22), and that the Moabites had given David's parents asylum when he had been a fugitive from Saul (1 Samuel 22:3-4). Moab must have done something quite serious to provoke this kind of conflict and cause David to order that two-thirds of Moab's military force be put to death and strong tribute demanded. (PBC)

He inscribed his version of the conflict with the allied invaders on a stone discovered in AD 1869. Written in a language similar to Hbr, this Moabite, or Mesha, Stone supplements and confirms the biblical account. On the stone, Jehoram is called Omri's son rather than his grandson. (TLSB)

a hundred thousand lambs and ... the wool of a hundred thousand rams. The heavy annual tribute (see Isa 16:1) that Israel required from the Moabites as a vassal state. (CSB)

Some of the tax came in the form of sheep and wool. The writer does not specify that the 100,000 lambs and wool of 100,000 rams was an annual payment. Perhaps this exorbitant tax was a one-time levy demanded by King Ahab. Therefore we are not surprised to hear that Mesha the king of Moab stopped sending tribute when Ahab died in battle. (PBC)

3:5 *king of Moab rebelled.* See note on 1:1. (CSB)

3:7 *Will you go with me to fight against Moab?* Joram wished to attack Moab from the rear (v. 8), but to do that his army had to pass through Judah. (CSB)

Ahaziah, son and successor of King Ahab, did nothing to bring Moab back into subjection during his two-year reign. But King Joram, Ahaziah's brother, wanted that tribute and was willing to go to war for it. After he had prepared his own army, Joram asked for assistance from Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. (PBC)

When men engage in projects without acknowledging God or seeking His direction, especially when they join the wicked in the prosecution of their plans, they may expect to be brought into trouble, and will have special reason for gratitude if they escape destruction. (CB)

I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses. See 1Ki 22:4. Jehoshaphat had already been condemned by prophets of the Lord for his alliance with the northern kings Ahab (see 2Ch 18:1; 19:1-2) and Ahaziah (2Ch 20:35-37), yet he agreed to join with Joram against Moab. Perhaps he was disturbed by the potential danger to Judah posed by the growing strength of Moab (see 2Ch 20), and he may have considered Joram less evil than his predecessors (see v. 2). (CSB)

Jehoshaphat had helped Ahab fight a losing battle against Ramoth-Gilead two years earlier. Now he again promised to help his neighbor. Jehoshaphat also suggested that they march directly south through Edom and attack Moab from the rear. (PBC)

3:8 *Through the Desert of Edom.* This route of attack took the armies of Israel and Judah south of the Dead Sea, enabling them to circumvent the fortifications of Moab's northern frontier and to avoid the possibility of a rearguard action against them by the Arameans of Damascus. The Edomites, who were subject to Judah, were in no position to resist the movement of Israel's army through their territory. (CSB)

Instead of crossing the Jordan above the Salt Sea and invading Moab from the north, the allied kings agreed on a "circuitous march" (v 9) around the southern end of the sea "by the way of the wilderness of Edom." (TLSB)

3:9 *king of Edom.* Although here designated a king, he was in reality a governor appointed by Jehoshaphat (see 8:20; 1Ki 22:47). (CSB)

They forced the Edomite king to join the expedition, assuring there would be no rear attack from the south. (TLSB)

Along the way they also picked up the assistance of the king of Edom, who according to 1 Kings 22:47, was merely a deputy under the control of Jehoshaphat. (PBC)

ANIMALS – Likely horses for chariots and mules for riding and packing provisions. (TLSB)

The kings planned their attack route and their food supply carefully. They took along herds of cattle to be used as meat. But someone made a serious miscalculation. When the armies had marched seven days into the wilderness west of the Dead Sea, they discovered that they did not have enough water for the soldiers or for the cattle. (PBC)

3:10 Jehoram expressed despair and blamed the Lord. In contrast, Jehoshaphat would seek the Lord (v 11). (TLSB)

Outwardly the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom were united in their plan against Moab. Inwardly, however, they were deeply divided. When troubles came, the king of Israel quickly forgot that this military campaign had been his own idea, and he accused God of leading them all into uncertain death. In this way Joram was like his father King Ahab. During his life he worshiped Baal and the golden calves. But when trouble came, he blamed God (1 Kings 18:17). "The sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7). (PBC)

Jehoshaphat, however, was a believer in the Lord. When trouble came, he turned to the true God. According to God's plan Elisha, the man who had been Elijah's personal servant, was there among the soldiers. Jehoshaphat knew that Elisha was a man of God, and the three kings immediately went to his tent. (PBC)

3:11 *Is there no prophet of the LORD here ... ?* See 1Ki 22:7. Only after the apparent failure of their own strategies did the three rulers seek the word of the Lord (v. 12). (CSB)

In times of danger it is always safest to go to God, and ask counsel of Him. (CB)

Elisha son of Shaphat is here. Since Elijah is reported to have sent a letter to Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram after his father's death (2Ch 21:12–15), it seems that Elisha accompanied the armies on this campaign as the representative of the aged Elijah. The event is narrated here after the account of Elisha's initiation as Elijah's successor and the two events that foreshadowed the character of his ministry. Following this introduction to Elisha's ministry, the present episode is topically associated with the series of Elisha's acts that now occupies the narrative. (CSB)

Traveling with the troops, perhaps as a chaplain would. (TLSB)

USED TO POUR WATER – Service that a person rendered his master or teacher. Washing was typically done by pouring because water was often scarce. (TLSB)

3:13 WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO WITH EACH OTHER – People sometimes tell us never to criticize another person's religion. Elisha, however, did not follow that advice. He looked at the unbelieving king of Israel and asked, "What do the two of us have in common?" The answer, of course, was nothing at all. Faith and unbelief, light and darkness, life and death have nothing in common. (PBC)

Go to the prophets of your father and ... mother. See 1Ki 22:6. (CSB)

We can hear the sarcasm in Elisha's voice as he says to Joram, "Why don't you consult the prophets of your father Ahab or the prophets of your mother Jezebel? Don't you remember what a great job they did at Mount Carmel when they tried to call down fire from heaven?" (PBC)

3:14 *if I did not have respect for ... Jehoshaphat ... I would not look at you.* Joram will share in the blessing of the word of God only because of his association with Jehoshaphat. (CSB)

We can hear the anger in Elisha's voice when he says to the unbelieving king, "I swear that if it were not for the presence of Jehoshaphat, I would not even look at your face!" (PBC)

From regard to His people, the Lord often bestows great blessings not only on them, but on others with whom they are connected; and the wicked may thus receive favors, which they would otherwise never obtain. (CB)

3:15 *bring me a harpist.* To create a disposition conducive to receiving the word of the Lord. (CSB)

Music is sometimes mentioned as a means to make a prophet receptive to divine inspiration. More often, “the hand of the LORD” came upon His spokesman without musical accompaniment (e.g., on Elijah and Ezekiel). (TLSB)

Most of us would have trouble speaking kind words when our hearts are full of righteous anger. Perhaps it was for this reason that Elisha now called for a minstrel, a musician, to play on the harp. Music is a powerful gift from God. Sacred music is a special gift which has the ability to calm our troubled hearts, to direct our attention away from earthly things to heavenly things. (PBC)

3:16 *this valley.* The Israelite armies were encamped in the broad valley (the Arabah) between the highlands of Moab on the east and those of Judah on the west, just south of the Dead Sea. (CSB)

pools. Natural depressions in the streambeds were valued and used like cisterns. (TLSB)

3:17 *will be filled with water.* The word of the Lord contained a promise and a directive. The Lord will graciously provide for his people, but they must respond to his word in faith and obedience (v. 16). (CSB)

3:19 The two armies will devastate the rebellious country. (CSB)

In the conquest of the Promised Land, the Israelites were not to engage in this scorched-earth policy (Dt 20:19–20). Moab, in a drier region, was more susceptible to such an attack. (TLSB)

3:20 *time for offering.* See Ex 29:38–39; Nu 28:3–4. (CSB)

water flowing from the direction of Edom. Flash floods in the distant mountains of Edom caused water to flow north through the broad, usually dry, valley that sloped toward the Dead Sea (see note on v. 16). (CSB)

Brook of Zered and other wadis flow from Edom toward the south end of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

3:21 *border.* Along the Brook of Zered. (TLSB)

3:22 *red as blood.* Reflection of the sun’s early morning glow on the reddish cast of the soil gave the water the appearance of blood. From this phenomenon, the Moabites drew the false conclusion that the allies had “struck one another down” (v 23). (TLSB)

3:23 *Those kings must have ... slaughtered each other.* The Moabites would have good reason to suspect that an internal conflict had arisen between the parties of an alliance whose members had previously been mutually hostile. (CSB)

to the spoil! Hoping to find a weak enemy, they advanced in an unguarded manner and suffered heavy losses in a counterattack by the Israelites (v 24). (TLSB)

3:25 *threw a stone.* Making the best fields difficult to cultivate, guaranteeing poorer crops and a less-resistant populace. (TLSB)

only its stones. Barren landscape. (TLSB)

Kir Hareseth. The capital city of Moab (see Isa 16:7, 11; Jer 48:31, 36), usually identified with present-day Kerak, located about 11 miles east of the Dead Sea and 15 miles south of the Arnon River. (CSB)

Identified with modern Kerak, Jordan, c 10 mi E of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

3:26 *break through to the king of Edom.* A desperate attempt by the king of Moab to induce Edom to turn against Israel and Judah. (CSB)

Perhaps Mesha (cf v 4) hoped the Edomites would offer less resistance. However, the Hbr words for Edom and Aram (Syria) look almost identical. If the original text read “Aram,” as translated in an ancient Latin version, then Mesha tried to break through to the north in an attempt to get help from the Syrians. (TLSB)

3:27 *offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall.* King Mesha offered his oldest son, the crown prince, as a burnt offering (see 16:3; Jer 7:31) to the Moabite god Chemosh (see 1Ki 11:7; Nu 21:29; Jer 48:46) in an attempt to induce the deity to come to his aid. (CSB)

Remarkable sacrifice to invoke the Moabite gods’ sympathy (perhaps Chemosh). (TLSB)

The fury against Israel was great. The Hebrew underlying this clause would normally refer to a visitation of God’s wrath. It may be that just when total victory appeared to be in Israel’s grasp, God’s displeasure with the Ahab dynasty showed itself in some way that caused the Israelite kings to give up the campaign. Comparing Aramaic and later Hebrew usage, a few scholars suggest that the Hebrew here can be translated, “There was great dismay upon/in Israel.” (CSB)

Meaning is unclear. Hbr term commonly speaks of God’s wrath. LXX indicates the Israelites felt regret. The armies perhaps withdrew from Mesha to show their revulsion at the human sacrifice (Lv 18:21; 20:3). Also, Jehoram and the Israelite leaders may have offended the Judeans and even the Edomites by the extreme nature of the siege or the negotiations, which brought on the horrific sacrifice. (TLSB)

Ch 3 King Jehoram led Jehoshaphat and the Edomites against Moab on an ill-conceived military campaign, which had some success due to the Lord’s intervention through Elisha. Today, do not equate poor planning with faith. For all your endeavors, seek God’s blessing through prayer and make your plans through the wisdom of His Word. The Lord grants us wisdom and thoughtful

hearts so that we may honor Him with our deeds. Thankfully, He planned for our victory over evil and our everlasting salvation in the person of His Son, Jesus, who offered Himself freely for the sins of all people. • Guide us, O Lord, toward purposeful ends that honor You. Amen.
(TLSB)