

## 2 KINGS 3

# BETTER LATE THAN NEVER – BLESSED ON BEHALF OF THE BELIEVER

Have you ever made a mistake? That is a rhetorical question. We all have. I make them all the time. I get on a roll, or sometimes something like a rut, where I fall into a pattern of making decisions based on “common sense.” I go into default mode. I’m running on logic and what I know. It is at these times that I tend to get into trouble. I’m sure it is the same for you.

Today we will see how this plays out in a battle for the soul of Israel. We will read about a physical battle – one that is brought on through what most will see as everyday events, economics and politics. But there is another battle going on here. It is the battle for the very soul of Israel. It has been going on since before Elijah won the showdown on Mt. Carmel. Will YHWH be the God of Israel or will they continue to worship Baal? God still wants reconciliation. How does God reach out to them in this scenario? Today we will get another example of how God works – not just “on His own,” but how He reaches out to the unbeliever through His people. Let’s look at the text.

***2Kings 3:1 <sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and mother, for he put away the <sup>9</sup>pillar of Baal that his father had made. <sup>3</sup>Nevertheless, he clung to <sup>i</sup>the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, <sup>j</sup>which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart from it.***

- Jehoram’s bio: This is part of the set-up. Jehoram is evil, but not like his father, Ahab. He tolerates the Baal worship but takes down the pillar of Baal that his father had set up in the Samarian temple.
- Remember, the bigger picture to all of this is that there is a battle for the soul of Israel. Who will be the God of Israel? Will it be Baal or YHWH?
- A political situation is building.

**2Kings 3:4** Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, <sup>k</sup>and he had to deliver to the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. <sup>5</sup> But <sup>l</sup>when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. <sup>6</sup> So King Jehoram marched out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>m</sup>I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.” <sup>8</sup> Then he said, “By which way shall we march?” Jehoram answered, “By the way of the wilderness of Edom.”

- Mesha, king of Moab has been paying tribute to Israel ever since the house of Omri took the throne back in 1 Kings. He is tired of paying tribute and senses that it is time to revolt with a new, young king on the throne.
- Jehoram seeks an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.
- This should sound familiar. We read of a similar situation in 1 Kings 22. In fact, Jehoshaphat responds ALMOST as he did in that chapter. But there is a difference. We will return to that later.
- Jehoram decides that they should attack Moab via the southern route. This may have given them an element of surprise. Also, Edom, at this time was a vassal of Judah. Therefore, they, Judah, have control of the territory. The march to the border of Moab should be easier this way.
- King of Edom – We read earlier in 1 Kings 22, that there was no vassal/puppet king in Edom – rather a deputy of Jehoshaphat was ruling Edom.

**2Kings 3:9** So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and <sup>n</sup>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. <sup>10</sup> Then the king of Israel said, “Alas! <sup>o</sup>The LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab.” <sup>11</sup> <sup>p</sup>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, <sup>q</sup>“Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, <sup>r</sup>who poured water on the hands of Elijah.” <sup>12</sup> 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.

- The southern route became a debacle of sorts. They seem to have been chasing their tails looking for water in this arid region. They wandered in

circles for seven days looking for water for the army and the support animals that were with them.

- Jehoram interpreted this as YHWH's attempt to deliver them into the hands of the Moabites.
- Like his father, whenever things go wrong, he looks towards YHWH as the source of the problem. It is strange, given the bigger picture, that there is a war going on for the soul of Israel, that the god which Israel follows, Baal, is never consulted. Despite the fact that he, Jehoram, has seen YHWH win time and again, he still can't bring himself to follow YHWH.
- Remember, everything, every situation in the Biblical world was considered a spiritual one. Nothing is due to chance or simple weather, or anything else for that matter.
- Jehoshaphat calls for a prophet. Recall how I mentioned that Jehoshaphat's words at the beginning of this chapter were ALMOST verbatim with the ones in 1 Kings 22, when Ahab sought an alliance with him to go to war against Syria?

**1Kings 22:1 For three years Syria and Israel continued without war. <sup>2</sup>But in the third year <sup>1</sup>Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. <sup>3</sup> And the king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" <sup>4</sup> And he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?" And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."**

- Can you see the similarities here?
- But there is also a difference – a BIG difference. Look at the next verse.

**1Kings 22:5 And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the LORD." <sup>6</sup>**

- Eventually, Micaiah, the prophet was sought out so Jehoshaphat could seek the will of God.
- In our text today, he, Jehoshaphat, didn't consult God before going into battle. He made a default decision. Now his army is in dire need of water and victory hangs in the balance.

- Jehoshaphat calls for Elisha in order to “pray” (seek the Lord for intervention).
- Elisha is found.

**2Kings 3:13** *And Elisha said to the king of Israel, <sup>5</sup>“What have I to do with you? Go to <sup>t</sup>the prophets of your father and to “the prophets of your mother.” But the king of Israel said to him, “No; it is <sup>o</sup>the LORD who has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab.” <sup>14</sup> And Elisha said, <sup>v</sup>“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. <sup>15</sup> But now <sup>w</sup>bring me a musician.” And when the musician played, <sup>x</sup>the hand of the LORD came upon him. <sup>16</sup> And he said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I will make this dry streambed full of pools.’ <sup>17</sup> For thus says the LORD, ‘You shall not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals.’ <sup>18</sup> This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD. He will also give the Moabites into your hand, <sup>19</sup> and you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree and stop up all springs of water <sup>y</sup>and ruin every good piece of land with stones.” <sup>20</sup> The next morning, about the time of <sup>z</sup>offering the sacrifice, behold, water came from the direction of Edom, till the country was filled with water.*

- Elisha doesn’t mince his words. He tells Jehoram that he should consult the prophets of his mother and father. Where are they when you need them?
- Jehoram responds by saying that is it YHWH that has placed them in this predicament, therefore, in his mind, YHWH should be the one who is to be consulted.
- Important note: There were no atheists in the ancient world. Jehoram, as well the other pagans, recognize that YHWH is real, but to the pagan mind, there are many gods and YHWH is just one of many. They “believe” in Him, but don’t worship Him. Therefore, they have no problem consulting with Him, but one of His prophets is necessary to ask Him anything.
- You can believe in “God,” and not follow or serve Him.

James 2:19

**<sup>t</sup>You believe that God is one; you do well. Even <sup>u</sup>the demons believe—and shudder!**

- Do you see the difference?
- Look at Elisha's answer.

**<sup>14</sup> And Elisha said, <sup>v</sup>“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.**

- This is a major point in the narrative. If it hadn't been for Jehoshaphat's presence, and his righteousness, Elisha would have told Jehoram to go and pound sand. It is because of Jehoshaphat, and only because of Jehoshaphat that Elisha is willing to give Jehoram an audience. Look at what he says next.

**<sup>15</sup> But now <sup>w</sup>bring me a musician.”**

- Seems like a pointless thing to do. Does this remind you of our two previous Sunday messages?
- They comply. Does that ring a bell?
- Elisha hears from God while the musician plays. What does God say?

**<sup>16</sup> And he said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I will make this dry streambed full of pools.’ <sup>17</sup> For thus says the LORD, ‘You shall not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals.’ <sup>18</sup> This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD. He will also give the Moabites into your hand, <sup>19</sup> and you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree and stop up all springs of water <sup>y</sup>and ruin every good piece of land with stones.” <sup>20</sup> The next morning, about the time of <sup>z</sup>offering the sacrifice, behold, water came from the direction of Edom, till the country was filled with water.**

- Are they to dig ditches or not? (Some translations say that they are to dig ditches and the LORD will fill them with water). Which is it? Not sure. In the Hebrew, it can go either way. I lean towards what we read in the ESV.
- This makes a difference in how the passage is taught. HMMM. It works either way, and I don't believe it changes things, on the whole.
- God will provide the water.

- This is a light thing for YHWH.
- The Moabites will be delivered into your hands.
- You shall attack every fortified, (major/ strategic) city, stopping up their wells, cutting down their trees and filling the fields with stones, (so as to make agriculture that much harder).
- But what about the Law? There are rules for warfare set out in the Law.

#### **Dt. 20: 10 – 20**

**Deut. 20:10** “When you draw near to a city to fight against it, <sup>p</sup>offer terms of peace to it. <sup>11</sup> And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. <sup>12</sup> But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. <sup>13</sup> And when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, <sup>q</sup>you shall put all its males to the sword, <sup>14</sup> <sup>r</sup>but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you <sup>s</sup>shall take as plunder for yourselves. And <sup>t</sup>you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. <sup>15</sup> Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here.

<sup>16</sup> But <sup>u</sup>in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, <sup>17</sup> but <sup>v</sup>you shall devote them to complete destruction, <sup>1</sup> the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, <sup>18</sup> that <sup>w</sup>they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you <sup>x</sup>sin against the LORD your God.

**Deut. 20:19** “When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, <sup>y</sup>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? <sup>20</sup> Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.

- Cities in near proximity, especially the ones who were, “more paganized,” were to be devoted to destruction, (herem). According to Elisha, these

Moabite cities were to be given the full treatment. (Just thought I would mention that).

- At any rate, the next morning, at the time of sacrifice, the waters came. God had supplied the need.

***2Kings 3:21 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> And they said, "This is blood; the kings have surely fought together and struck one another down. Now then, Moab, to the spoil!" <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>1 25</sup> And they overthrew the cities, and <sup>a</sup>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 <sup>b</sup>Kir-hareseth, and the slingers surrounded and attacked it. <sup>26</sup> When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him 700 <sup>c</sup>swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom, but they could not. <sup>27</sup> Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place <sup>d</sup>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.***

- The next morning, the Moabites, having found the Israelite camp, see the all the water, but it appears "red" to them. They see this as blood, believing that the Israelites had fought among themselves, killing each other. Believing the Israelite army to be dead, or at least weak and in disarray, the Moabites attack. But they are repelled and driven back into Moab – the Israelites killing them as they retreated. While on the advance, they Israelites stop up the wells, fell the trees and fill the fields with rocks. Mesha, king of Moab attempts a counterattack with his swordsmen, but that fails. In a last-ditch effort to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, he sacrifices his son, burning him and hanging, (impaling) him on the wall of the city. This seemed to spark the Moabites and they, "bring great wrath (human) on Israel. The Israelites retreat, most likely thinking that they have done enough damage for the time being. In the end, Israel is the victor.

So, what are we to make of this? Is it just an historic account of a battle? We actually have an account of the same battle on what is called the, “Moabite stone.” It is definitely pro-Moab, but it is an account of the same campaign.

Remember, the books of the kings are not just history. They are narrative accounts meant to teach us theology. Once again, what are we to make of this?

The first 8 verses of the chapter are set-up, giving us a very brief bio of Jehoram and the political landscape/ context of the story. Jehoram, who isn't quite as bad as his parents, is still a pagan. Moab, a vassal state is in rebellion and no longer wants to pay tribute, seeing the young king as being inexperienced and weak. Jehoram seeks an alliance with Judah. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah agrees to the alliance and they decide to attack Moab from the South, through the Judean territory of Edom. But, while on their way, they wind up going in circles, and can't find water. This is all set-up.

The “turn in the story,” the issue at hand is that while on the way to battle, they can't find water. This threatens the entire military campaign.

It is then, that Elisha, (God is Salvation) is consulted. Remember how Jehoshaphat, before making a similar alliance with Ahab, consulted the prophet. This time he didn't. He simply made a default decision. It made sense, politically and militarily. Therefore, he decided to go with the alliance. But the campaign soon ran into problems. Due the water shortage, the campaign was in danger of having to be aborted or even worse, a major defeat. That would be disastrous for Israel, politically and economically.

But when Elisha, (God is Salvation) is consulted, (read prayer,) God intervenes to supply water and even guarantees a victory. Israel went on to win the war. But what is the application?

First of all, we have seen more than one recurring theme. The first one being that of not relying on “default decisions.” Just because something seems to make sense and it is what most people do, that is not necessarily what God would have his people do. We are a peculiar people. We are not to “think” like the world. God is to be consulted in order that we know we are walking in His will. Doing what is



normal and what makes sense to everyone in the business world, (or whatever spheres in which we walk) is not necessarily the will of God for our lives.

But I believe we find the meat/ heart of the matter, in two points, in verse 14.

Elisha, (God of Salvation) only answers Jehoram because of Jehoshaphat's faith and character. On one level, Jehoshaphat should have consulted Elisha, (God of Salvation) before making his decision, but he didn't. He dropped the ball, as we all do at times. God gave him grace. But when Elisha was consulted, the only reason God responded positively, if at all, was due to Jehoshaphat's faith and character. What does this tell us? The unbeliever can and will sometimes be blessed due the faith and character of the unbeliever. This is awesome! How many times do we have the opportunity to intercede for the unbeliever – despite their unbelief? We are to be a blessing to others – believer and unbeliever alike. What was Abram told to do when God said he was to leave his home and go to Canaan? He was to go and be a blessing. As Christians, imagers of God, we are to do the same.

On another level, there is an even bigger battle going on here for the soul of the northern kingdom, Israel. God is a God of reconciliation. We can refer to this as grace. God is in a battle with Baal for the soul of Israel. We have seen this ever since Elijah's showdown on Mt. Carmel. In this instance, God is helping a wayward child, Israel. This is a positive move on God's part. If Jehoram would only see that God is delivering him and his kingdom from an enemy, and then turn to YHWH, there could be revival and prosperity. Sadly, we know from an historical perspective that this doesn't happen. **God is blessing them in spite of themselves. God blesses nations in spite of themselves. Blessings don't necessarily mean that a person, a culture or a nation is on the right track. Think about that for a while.**

Does the unbeliever have access to God? Jehoram would not have been heard by Elisha, "God is Salvation" if not for Jehoshaphat's faith and character. But we all approach God in unbelief at some point. The difference is the heart. When an unbeliever approaches God in humility – he/ she is heard. All sinners have to come to God on these grounds, at first. Jehoram knows who YHWH is, he just doesn't have faith in Him as the one true God. Jehoram didn't approach God, (Elisha, typologically) in humility. Therefore, Jehoshaphat, because of his faith and character, stood in the gap, as it were.

We have to know that as believers, that we need to know the will of God in order to make good decisions and live a more consistent life, walking in His will. But, when we drop the ball, as Jehoshaphat did, by not first consulting God, God will pick up the ball, in order to advance His plan. This is grace.

And we are to see that as believers, we can stand in the gap for the unbeliever, thereby bringing God's blessing upon them, in the hope that they will see God move in their lives, in order that they may believe.

God wants reconciliation with the unbeliever just as He did with His wayward nation of Israel. And He wants reconciliation with us also. He is always reaching out to us as well as the unbeliever. And sometimes He will reach out to the unbeliever through us, His children. We must stand in the gap and then will can see God move in their lives, as well as ours. Keep in touch with God and He will move mountains not only for us, but others also.