

Kings and Prophets 14-01-10a

This is Friday, January the 10th, 2014. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets. We'll be tonight in Second Kings chapter three, and we resume after a number of interruptions to our schedule, our routine.

We're in a different place, but we're in the right book. So we'll take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration by going to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father, what a privilege it is for us to set aside the tasks and responsibilities that beset us and that occupy our working day to fellowship, to enjoy the company of believers who share enthusiasm for your word and for improving understanding of it so that we can live in a way that pleases you.

We thank you for the passage that we study tonight. We ask your blessing on us as we do so. May God, the Holy Spirit, find us ready students and impressionable with the truth that will transform our minds, motivate us, encourage us, strengthen us to learn the things that you have for us in this life so that we will be prepared for the life to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have transitioned now rather thoroughly and extensively from the prophet Elijah to the prophet Elisha.

Our study is Kings and Prophets, and we're going to see tonight the interaction of three kings with the prophet Elisha. It's amusing to me that we have just emerged from the season where we sing about three kings, but now we're going to study three kings and we're going to see some interesting details with regard to the prospective attack on the Edomites, or actually the Moabites, involving the Edomites, as well as northern and southern Israel, for reasons that are a bit of a head scratcher. But this account is given to us, and it is a challenge, as is often the case, to discern why we would care.

There's an ancient dispute. There's a couple of dusty kings who go marching off and decide to settle this dispute. Interesting circumstances ensue.

The prophet of God speaks. Miraculous things happen. And we want to answer for ourselves the question, so what? That was a long time ago, and I really could care less about Moabite sheep.

Which are really the issue that gets this whole thing started. So what we want to do is apprise ourselves of the details of this story. Note that we're dealing here with the prophet Elisha, not the prophet Elijah, and we already have some knowledge of the typological import of that fact.

We have extensively studied the relationship between Elijah and Elisha and what they represent. We know that Elijah is the prophet that sort of embodies and typifies the age of the law, the age of judgment, the age of conviction of what is wrong. As he departs the scene, if not the planet, and transfers his mantle to Elisha, we see in Elisha foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And his fulfillment of prophecy and rather than judgment, there is healing rather than retribution. There is restoration. There is this double portion of the spirit that accomplishes things that we didn't see in the days of Elijah.

And all of this is a part of the mystery. This, I think, is part of what Jesus would have explained on the road to Emmaus. How many times have we thought how wonderful it would be to, first of all, be able to understand the language and then secondly, to be traveling along, maybe just being a hod carrier or a foot servant or something, going along with these two gentlemen who were on their way to Emmaus and the Lord Jesus Christ appears beside them and they talk about the events of the crucifixion in the last few days and they're sorrowful.

And this stranger begins to explain all of the things that had to be true of the Christ from the Old Testament. He opens the scriptures and explains why these things had to be so. And the men say, did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the way? I would like to be that guy.

I would like to be someone who hears the word of God and it burns within me and it makes a difference. So this, I think, is going to be a part of that mystery truth that it was revealed, but not evident. It was there, but didn't make sense except in hindsight.

This is one of those chapters. And believe it or not, the Moabite sheep thing is a pretty big deal. So we're going to look at it.

Let's read it. First of all, you remember now that after the old bald head 42 chapter, the old bald children mauled by the two she bears, the last verse of chapter two, Elisha went from there to Mount Carmel and from there he returned to Samaria. So when last seen, Elisha was back in northern Israel.

And this is, I've often pointed out where I think chapter breaks are bad. This is a good chapter break. This is a good place to kind of start fresh.

And there are markers in the text to indicate this. So in chapter three, second Kings, now Jehoram, the son of Ahab, became king over Israel at Samaria in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and he reigned 12 years. We had a complete break in subject matter.

We've got a historical note here. We've got a background and context. Who is on the throne? When did he come to the throne? What is his relationship to the southern kingdom? Now we've already seen Jehoshaphat previously.

How long has Jehoshaphat been ruling down in Israel? 18 years. How long is Jehoram going to reign in northern Israel from this point? 12 years. But verse two, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother.

Who are his father and mother? Ahab. Who's the mother? Jezebel. This is important because we're going to have a reference to them a few verses down.

So when you are the son of a thing, what was, how did Barnabas get his name? What does Barnabas mean? Bar means son of, Nabas means encouragement. That wasn't his actual name. That was his, that was his nickname.

That was what people called him because he was just one of those people. And we've known people that are sort of a son of encouragement. They're just, it's like they embody those, they just bring it into the room.

Jehoram is the son of Ahab and Jezebel. So what are the prospects that he's going to be a wonderful great king? Pretty dim, pretty dim. And having detailed, you remember this is one book in the original.

We've already seen the illustrious star-crossed career of Ahab and Jezebel. So we know what this guy's like. He is a son and he is evil in the sight of the Lord.

He performs evil, but not like his father and mother. He did put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made. So he's pulled back from the excessive promotion of Baal that his father engaged in.

And he gets credit for it in scripture. He was evil, but not as evil. Point of observation, if not application.

God does distinguish shades of guilt, shades of responsibility for what is evil. He's evil, but he's not as evil. This would discourage us from sort of absolutism, you know, pure black and white.

If there's one morsel with leaven, then the leaven is leavened the whole lump. And I cast it out of the house. We want to be careful.

God distinguishes degrees of evil and also degrees of good. And in time, he responds accordingly. And we should be sensitive to the fact that there are some things that are in fact worse than others.

There are the lesser of evils. I just pointed out in passing, scripture here tells us this guy was evil, but not as evil. And it's helpful to remember that we should be sensitive to these kinds of distinctions as we navigate our way through a corrupt and fallen world, as we deal with one another in our corrupt and fallen nature.

Some things are worse than others, and they merit degrees of response accordingly. I forget who it is. I think it might be Jerry Reed that wrote a song and called it a major attempt at a minor thing.

Think about that. Minor things deserve minor responses. Major things deserve major responses.

And when we start producing major responses to minor things, we need to come back and think about this passage, especially what God is going to do. So, verse three, nevertheless, he

persisted in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Now, what are the sins of Jeroboam in which he is persisting? Well, in a nutshell, this consists in what we find back in 1 Kings, chapter 12.

Jeroboam made two calves of gold and said to the people, it is too much for you to go to Jerusalem. Worship up here. I've made an acceptable substitute.

I've made an accommodation for your convenience. Just worship up here. So he set one of the calves up in Bethel, he put the other in Dan, as you'll recall.

And so the people went there instead of observing the Levitical feasts that required assembly in Jerusalem. And this reinforced the split. It degraded respect for God and the motivation that God had in creating the assembly feasts, which was to bring everyone in one place and be reminded, as they stood outside the temple, separated only by thin walls from the Shekinah of God, of their covenant responsibility to Him.

Out of sight, out of mind. There is a distance, there's a separation. And this is what occurs.

Again, this is an observation, not quite an application. But the more distance we place between ourselves and the people of God and the things of God and exposure to the Word of God, the more easy it is to end up worshipping a calf that we rationalize as being the same when it's not. This is the sin of Jeroboam.

And what Jehoram is held accountable for is persisting in that sin. Yes, he took down the active worship place for Baal, but he perpetuated the watered-down, substitute, illicit worship of God through these calves. And he's tagged for that.

So, Misha, here's where we get to the sheep. We had a wonderful study of sheep over Christmas. Here's sheep in the Old Testament, coincidentally enough.

Misha, the king of Moab, was a sheep breeder. This guy, coincidentally, is responsible for the Moabite stone, just archaeologically speaking. You can look at the thing in the same way that you can see the Siloam tunnel inscription that was done in the days of Hezekiah.

You can see the Moabite stone that was created in the days of this king, Misha. It's just fascinating. You see even a reproduction of one of these things.

And for me, I just can't quit looking at it. I think, here is an artifact. This isn't some tour guide pointing out where Jesus walked, covered by layers of, you know, feet of dirt and sand and landscape changes and, you know, Byzantine churches and misidentifications, everything else.

This is an actual object that was actually there. This stone could have reverberated to the voice of King Misha himself. King Hezekiah may have walked down and looked at this inscription when it was complete.

And this thing, if it had eyes looking back, would have seen King Hezekiah and everything. It's

just, it's really something to me. It's similar to the sense I get when I just look at the Hebrew text and I think, these are the letters, these are the words, these are the sentences that Moses himself constructed in the Pentateuch.

He put this stuff down. I'm looking at a copy of a copy of a copy. I've got Aramaic alphabet instead of Hebrew.

But nevertheless, it's not that dark of a glass. I'm looking at the inspired account that Moses himself set down. This is what he wrote.

It just is amazing. Well, this is Misha, king of Moab. He's the guy responsible for the Moabite stone.

He was a sheep breeder. Now, this doesn't mean that they went down and said, hey, sheep breeder, come up and be king. But this is his big emphasis.

Maybe his family was involved in this. He's got business interest in sheep. Moab is a relatively fertile pasture land, unlike the land further south that is closer to the Arabah, down south at the Dead Sea and so on.

You've got maps in your Bible. Turn back to the back here. We'll be referring to this map a couple of times.

But find any Old Testament map, particularly if you've got one that portrays the divided kingdom. Nearly every Bible's got a divided kingdom map. I've got one here, the divided kingdom, Israel and Judah.

And if you look to the southeast of the Dead Sea, you will see Moab. If you can't see it, here's mine right here. You can see the Dead Sea.

You can see Moab. Okay, southeast of the Dead Sea, directly south of Moab is the land of Edom. And of course, west of the Dead Sea, you've got Judah.

Northwest, up toward the Sea of Galilee, you have the northern kingdom, right? So this is our geography. So the king of Moab, he's pretty much east and a little bit east-southeast. That's his land of the Dead Sea.

It's mountainous in the western portion. It flattens out as you get further east. There's going to be some drainage.

There's going to be some water that gets scooped out of the clouds by these mountains that border the eastern side of the Dead Sea. And this is the water that's going to go down and make these grasslands and pasture lands on which the king of Moab raises a huge number of sheep. Okay? So he is a sheep breeder.

And he regularly paid the king of Israel 100 elephs of lambs and the wool of 100 elephs of rams.

So there's 100 elephs of lambs with an L, and there's the wool of 100 elephs of rams. Now, we have talked before about what eleph means in Scripture.

And nominally it means 1,000. But any time you're talking about groups of people, and I think also groups of sheep, this is going to be a smaller unit. 100,000 lambs to send annually is a whopping lot of lambs.

And the wool, you look at the area of land and what's required to support sheep. I researched all this this past week. And maybe this is true, but it's equally possible.

A normal flock size, the number of ewes that you typically have per ram and so on, is more in the 25 range, not 1,000. Be that as it may, the quantity is not terribly important. But think about this.

The typical shearing of a ram, of a wool-bearing variety, and that would be what he was raising. He's not raising them for milk or meat, but for wool. The wool-bearing varieties, a ram, when you shear him, will typically produce roughly 20 pounds of wool.

So if you're sending the wool from 100,000 rams every year, this is 2 million pounds of wool annually, which I think is a bit of a stretch. Maybe, but I think this is where our LF definition comes back into play. For those of you that might be a little rusty on the LF explanation, this has been very beautifully studied out and written out by several different individuals.

There's a really nice discussion by Colin Humphreys that was published in *Vetus Testamentum* back in 1998. If you can find volume 48 of *Vetus Testamentum*, he's got a really excellent article. In a nutshell, he is looking at Numbers 3, verse 46, where it says the 273 first-born Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites.

And working with that clue, it's a long story. You can get the details from him. This is not our study tonight.

But what he determined is that LF often means troop or clan instead of thousand. And working with that, instead of there being 603,550 Israelite men 20 years of age and older at the Exodus, that's the standard calculation that there were 603,550 men plus their wives and children. This is the 2 million you often hear cited as leaving Egypt.

But if LF is translated as troop and you separate out that there are 45 clans and 100 men rather than 45,100 men, this makes a radical difference in the numbers. And what you end up with after all is said and done is the number of men over 20 is 5,550. With their wives and family, this gives a group of about 20,000 leaving Egypt.

This is much more believable in practical terms. This group wandering the wilderness for 40 years, living off the land, marching out and so on. People have done these wild calculations.

How long would it take 2 million people to cross the dried Yom Suf and so on? Well, all of these

things, because this isn't claimed to be a miracle of God. We're not trying to explain away the miracles. We're trying to understand realistically what happened.

And so I am a firm believer, as I've told you many times, that we've goofed this a little bit. And we need to distinguish between when the Bible is talking about clans and when it's talking about men. So just for purposes of discussion, if somebody starts throwing the 2 million people at you and how impossible it is, tell them, look, that's based on a misunderstanding as some other traditional beliefs are.

And that it is far more likely that what the Bible tells us very specifically is there were 5,550 men 20 years and older with their wives and family. You do your multiply by 4 and you get about 20,000 people. So that having been said, this is possibly the same idea.

You can talk about someone having their flocks and herds. But when you start talking about actual numbers, what is the manageable number of sheep that a guy can drive or associate with a ram and so on? And this comes down from LF meaning a thousand to LF meaning a clan sized group of sheep, which is much smaller. So be that as it may, it doesn't help or hurt our discussion here.

But he is sending this tribute. Now, why is he sending this tribute? Here's why. Because back in 2 Samuel chapter 8, David defeated Moab.

He forced them down to the ground and measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death and with one full line he measured those that would be kept alive. And the Moabites became David's servants and brought tribute.

And ever since 2 Samuel chapter 8, Moab has been sending tribute to Israel. Now, what happened when the kingdom divided? The king of Moab says, well, I ain't paying both kings. So I'm going to pay the guy that's more scary.

I'm going to pay the guy with the bigger army. I'm going to pay the guy that I don't want to come down and wreck my happiness. So Moab has continued to pay tribute, especially in the days of Ahab and Jezebel to the northern kingdom.

Well, when Jehoram takes the throne, Misha says, you know what? These guys are in disarray. Ahab's gone. The scary queen doesn't have the power she had before.

So I think I'm going to quit. I'm not going to pay this tribute that we've historically been paying for all these generations. So he stops.

So Jehoram comes out of Samaria and musters all Israel. He says, if the guy thinks I'm not going to demand this payment, he's got another thing coming. So let's get the army.

I can't afford to lose all of these lambs and all of this wool. This is a big benefit that we have this tribute. So he goes and sends to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, saying the king of Moab has

rebelled against me.

Notice he doesn't say rebelled against us. So what is not explicitly stated in scripture and what I would suggest here is it is probable that the promise Jehoram makes to Jehoshaphat is, look, you join me. We go down and beat Misha into submission.

And when he starts sending the tribute again, I'll split it with you. Otherwise, why does Jehoshaphat care that Jehoram is not getting the tribute? But and he actually has sort of a legal claim to it because it goes back to their common ancestor, David. Right.

So it's I would suggest it's a speculation that the enticement here to participate is share in the in the spoils. He wouldn't have had this otherwise. But if he'll go help subdue Misha, then at least the promise is some of this wool and some of this lamb inventory will come to you.

So will you come and fight against Moab? Jehoshaphat says, I will go up. I am as you are. My people are as your people, my horses as your horses.

And of course, this also means that if you're getting tribute, I'm getting tribute. Right. We're the same.

That lets, you know, brotherhood and unity and so on. We've talked about this before in another context. You know, it's not the first time the king of Judah has gotten hornswoggled into a bad idea.

It's happened in the days of Micaiah. So he said, which way shall we go up? And he answered, by the way of the wilderness of Edom. And this is the last thing I want to look at before the break.

So turn back to your map. He says, we're going to go by the way of Edom. If I'm Misha and I expect that there may be some reaction from the king of Israel to my cutting off of tribute, where would I expect him to come? How would he come attack me? He's going to cross the Jordan and come hit me from the north.

Right. So Jehoram says, I don't know. No, I'm going to flank him.

I'm going to surprise him. I'm going to hit him from the rear. We'll take the hard road now that I've recruited Jehoshaphat and he's on my side.

Not only do I have additional troops, but I've got a path because I can march my army through Judah without Judah thinking I'm coming down there to take him over. Right. This is now my ally.

So we'll march down and hook around and hit him from the south. Now, this works all the way until you get right to the south of the Dead Sea. But then what happens? What other territory do you have to cross? Edom.

You've got to go through Edom if you're going to hit Moab from the south. Look at your map. So who else do you have to recruit into the scheme? King of Edom.

What do you think the King of Edom is going to think if he sees the combined armies of northern and southern Israel marching toward him? Eek is what he's going to think. So Jehoram sends down there and says, Hey, King of Edom, here's our plan and we'll make you a partner. We'll split this stuff, you know, based on the size of the kingdoms.

Maybe I keep 60 percent. I send 20 percent to Judah and I'll send 20 percent to you. We'll split the spoils here.

You'll make money on this deal. You'll make lambs and wool. So the King of Edom says, OK, fine, I'm in.

Now, Jehoram has got his marching path all the way. He's going to hook around unobserved. Moab is not going to be able to look across the Dead Sea and see these guys coming.

So if he can keep a little bit of operational security, he can surprise them. He can he can hit them where they ain't. Moab has got a sort of a tenuous relationship with Edom.

They're not really expecting problems from the Edom border. So this is the big plan. Now, let me ask you this.

What's the big problem in Israel that was stated at the beginning of the chapter? What is Jehoram perpetuating in Israel? The sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. You're not honoring God. You're not honoring your covenant with God.

Yeah, you've pulled back from actively worshiping Baal, but you've still got a corrupted, deluded, perverse form of worship up there that doesn't honor your covenant with the Lord God. Now, as these guys march south and come around, what can they not help but observe? When did the Dead Sea become the Dead Sea? When did it become unfit to drink? When did God forever poison that water? When did that happen? In the days of Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his wife, Pillar of Salt. So it's historical ground.

A lot of these army troops have never been down there. What do you think people are going to talk about? You know where we are? You know what's going on here? You know this water that we're looking at? Us in northern Israel, never see the Dead Sea. We don't go down to Judah.

We don't go down to Edom. Here we are. This is like American troops going over to France.

Or American troops going over to England and seeing historical sites and castles and things that they've only read about. These stories are being rehearsed. The history of their nation is being reviewed.

You can't help it. Wow, this brackish, horrible water, how did this happen? Well, let me tell you how it happened. And around the campfires at night, all of these people are reviewing and

rehearsing.

You know, there's a God that made a covenant with our father Abraham. He did this. Fire and brimstone rained down from heaven.

And let me tell you about Lot and his wishy-washy, half-baked obeisance to the Lord God compared to Abraham. He's the one that nearly got nailed. And guess where these Moabites and these Edomites were about to join up with? Guess where they came from? Guess where the Moabites came from? These guys that we're going to attack? Coincidentally, they came from the offspring of Lot.

Guess where these Edomites came from? Esau, the off-brother, the one that didn't care about the covenant, didn't care about the birthright. We're linking up with the Edomites and we're going to attack the Moabites. And we're skirting, we're marching all the way around.

It's not Jericho. We're marching around the Dead Sea. Is there a little thumping on the helmet here, a little knocking on the door, a little awakening chorus being sung? Hey, think.

That's exactly what's going on. And it's no accident that as they take this course, all of these historic references are brought to mind. This is critical background.

We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, what happens in the rest of this chapter is conditioned by and built on what we have just observed. If this was our only Bible class, somebody listened to it.

If you're listening in a future day and can't come back for the second session, so what? God is for us. He is not against us. If we stray, whether through apathy and indifference or through conscious directing ourselves in a bad path, there is nothing God wants more than to bring us back, to restore us.

And He will put things in our path to turn us, to restore us, to draw us back to Himself. This is what God does because He's our Heavenly Father. We are linked to Him irrevocably and eternally through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And He treats us as a father would treat a wayward child. And He uses positive means to call to us. And how much better for us to be sensitive to that, to respond to it, to be restored in and through it, and to come back under the blessing and the purposeful life that God has granted to us and has called us to.

If these people would stop and think, God is ready to do so much for them. And He's about to demonstrate it in the rest of this chapter. It is a call.

It is an appeal. It is a positive action on the part of God. Rather than judgment, it is providence.

It is an expression of God's mercy and His generosity, what He is doing. And this sets the stage. This paints the backdrop.

This reminds them of the Lord God. They can't take this path without reviewing centuries of their own history and their origins and their definitional covenant relation with God. We can do the same thing.

And when we do that, we will find ourselves returning to the light, returning to the narrow road, heading for the straight gate. This is our opportunity. We can learn from the example of these people that seem so hard-headed and stiff-necked.

We have some advantages they don't. We have what Elisha has. We've got a double portion of God's spirit.

Let's pause here and take our break.