Kings and Prophets 14-01-17a

This is Friday the 17th of January 2014. We're in the book of 2 Kings. We are one of the few groups anywhere in the world that's going through 2 Kings.

So count yourself among the elite, among the special, among the hardcore. We don't do, you know, topical psalms. We go where angels almost literally fear to tread.

So we're in 2 Kings 3. We're looking at the attack of the northern, southern, and Edomite kingdoms upon Mesha, king of Moab. And a fascinating story it is. We'll take a moment to dedicate our time and our study to the Lord and ask His blessing on it, and then we'll begin.

Father, it is such a wonderful thing to pause and reflect on what we have become in Christ through Your grace. The things that have been allotted to us in this age, the privileges that are ours, not through any merit of ours, and not that we have anything to boast of in our own strength or of our own accomplishment, but the Lord Jesus has secured these things for us and has granted them to us, and we're excited to be members of His body and looking forward to the day when we will be united with Him and move upward and outward into the realms of glory and see the further unfolding of Your plan. We know that the study of Your Word is an essential part of our preparation and our readiness and our training, and we pray that as we look at this portion of it together this evening, that Your Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, that we will gain a better understanding not only of what the text says, but of its pertinence and its applicability as we navigate and negotiate the assignments that we have in this life.

We thank You for this passage and we pray that You will bless it to our hearts. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

2 Kings 3, you remember that we have this really odd situation where we've got a prophet with the double portion and we've got a king up in the north and we've got a king down in the south, and before long we're going to have two kings with the same name and we have such doublings, and we briefly even have a reunification of the nation of Israel in a common goal. You've got the northern and southern kingdoms, Joram or Jehoram, depending on which historical account you follow in the Bible. Here in 2 Kings 3, he is Jehoram, the son of Ahab, is king in Israel.

Jehoshaphat is down in Judah. He's evil, but not as evil as some guys. We find out in verse 2. But he persists in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.

We reviewed that last time. This is the golden calf worship, discouraging people from going down to the temple in Judah, but staying up in the northern kingdom and worshipping these calves. He encourages a lot of defection and apathy in the worship of God, which naturally leads people to choose alternatives that will include the gods of his father and mother.

And this is Baal, the god of his father Ahab, and Ashdart, the prophets who serve that fake

goddess, eat at Jezebel's table. So it's a sorry state of affairs. And one of the things we can observe in general is that we have to really think before consciously allying ourselves with someone who is on a known bad path.

Now, it is not always a consequence that comes out in circumstances. It's a dangerous thing to judge what happens based on circumstances, because in the short term, things may seem very expedient. They may look like they worked out fine.

We cooperated with, we tolerated, we joined hands with people that we really should not be associating with, and in the short term, it seems to be fine. We're going to see a situation like that tonight. There's going to be a great victory granted by God, even though this is something of an unholy alliance.

However, the measurement that we make is not circumstance. It is principle, what is right and what is wrong. Many times, what is right is costly.

Let me ask you this. When John the Baptist began preaching and heralding the coming of Jesus, he made many enemies, and he eventually ends up in the prison of Herod. And for speaking the truth and being uncompromising in his message and in his mission, he eventually gets his head cut off.

If he had done the expedient thing, the politic thing, the let's not make waves thing, he could have been free, and he could have rationalized this and said, you know, if I don't run afoul of the authorities here, I'll have a long and fruitful ministry. I can teach my disciples. I can continue to pave the way for the Messiah.

Why cause myself all this trouble by speaking out in truth and bearing witness? The Lord Jesus could have said the same thing. Why anger the Pharisees? Why pronounce the woes on the Pharisees and point out their hypocrisy in front of the people and annoy them to the point that they start plotting against my life? Why don't I sort of soft-pedal it when they're around, and I can stay here longer. I can heal more people.

I can do more teaching, present more parables, train my disciples longer and more thoroughly than this little three-year period that I've had. And if Jesus had done the expedient thing, the convenient thing, the least resistance thing, we would not have our salvation because it's not expedient to go to the cross. It's not expedient for the Apostle Paul to preach the church-age truths that we have in the New Testament and be stoned and imprisoned and shipwrecked and beaten, get the 40 stripes minus one three different times, be stoned and left for dead in Lystra, and all of the other sufferings and persecutions that he endured.

That's not the easy way. And if he was measuring whether he was doing right or not by the circumstances, you'd have to say, well, he did everything wrong. Look at the horrible stuff he endured.

Everybody does the expedient thing. A thief starts out with nothing and ends the evening with a

van full of stuff. That's a good night for him.

His circumstances have greatly improved. Now he's got flat-screen televisions and computers and all kinds of great stuff that he can sell, pawn, trade, cash out and line his path. We have to watch.

Jehoshaphat is a good king. He has sent teachers throughout the southern kingdom to teach the word of God, to inculcate and ingrain the truth of God and the covenant relationship they have with God among the people. He's done many good things.

But here he makes a mistake allying himself with the wicked king of Israel in the north. Furthermore, they rope in the king of Edom for expedient sake. This is going to give them an avenue to go around and attack the king of Moab.

Well, the plan starts to go literally south. As you know, I don't like that term. When people say, well, it's all going south, this is an expression that goes back to the Civil War.

And going south means going down to the confederacy where things are rags and tatters. My suggestion is, if you want to say that things are, as the British say, going pear-shaped, if you want an American expression, say they're going north. That's my suggestion.

Things are going north here. They're deteriorating. They're falling apart.

That's just because we're in Texas. Be that as it may, these guys have started out. They've got a wonderful plan.

Three different armies. They're going against Moab, which is one country. And they've got the entire army of the northern kingdom of Israel, the entire army of the southern kingdom of Israel, and they've roped in the king of Edom with his troops.

It's a tri-part alliance. And they've got the element of surprise. What a great strategy.

The king of Moab figures that the king of Israel is going to be upset because he has stopped sending tribute that they have been sending to Israel ever since the days of David. David laid them under tribute. David marked a line and executed some of them and put the rest of them under tribute way back when he defeated Moab.

Hundreds of years they've been paying this tribute. Misha says, I've had enough. I don't think they've got the starch in their robes to come down here and do anything.

And I'll fortify my northern border, and I'll dare him to come across. Well, they've got strength in numbers, and they think they've got a wonderful plan because we're not going to attack from the north. We're not going to cross the Jordan and come down upon Moab from the north.

We're going to go down the western side of the Dead Sea. We'll hook around through the dry

Jordan Valley. We won't even come around the shore of the Dead Sea.

We'll go east, and we'll go up the slopes, and then we'll descend on them from the high ground into Moab and catch them unawares. It will be glorious, and we've done it all ourselves. Jehoshaphat says, you know, how could anything possibly go wrong? And so down they go.

Well, what happened? In verse 6, King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. He went and sent to Jehoshaphat, the king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me? He says, sure.

So verse 9, the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days. You know the map of the Holy Land. You've got the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, little briny, undrinkable, nasty, mineral-laden remnants of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, brimstone-filled lake, the Dead Sea.

So they marched south, they marched east, fairly well east, and they hooked back to the north, and they're going to come in and attack in a northwesterly direction, from the heights down into the plains of Moab. They think this is going to be great. However, look at verse 9. They marched on that roundabout route seven days, and there was no water for the army nor for the animals that followed them.

Now, what animals are following the army? It's not like dogs and cats. What animals are with the army? What's in the baggage train? This is supplies. This is chow and sacrificial animals.

You've got some prophets of Baal to sacrifice. They've got all the bases covered. How can this go wrong? We've got the God of Israel nominally on our side, and we've got Baal, and we've got Ashtar.

We've got all kinds of sacrificial animals, and we've got animals to slaughter for food. So this is beef on the hoof that's coming around with them. Well, after a week in this dry season, it didn't dawn on them somehow that they would run out of water.

But they do, and there's no water to be found. They're down on the northern reaches of the Arabah down there, the desert, and there's no water, none at all. Can't find it.

And this is a very sizable group of both men and animals. So all the plans of mice and men aft gang of glee, right? It's all coming unraveled on them. So the King of Israel, now, I think maybe even of the three, Jehoshaphat would have something going on spiritually.

Apparently the King of Israel is even behind the King of Edom because he's the first one to throw up his hands and say, all is lost. This is what happens when you put your trust in the flesh. Cursed, remember the memory verse? Say it with me.

Cursed is a man who puts his trust in man and makes flesh his strength. He shall be like a shrub in the desert, right? Well, here is King Shrub of the Desert saying, alas, you don't want to hear

your king. If you're in a military organization, you don't want the commanding officer walking out and saying, alas, this doesn't inspire confidence and motivation and esprit de corps when the commander in chief comes out and just starts crying.

But that's what he does. Alas, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab. Now, who called the three kings together? He did.

But who has in his mind now, whose fault is it? I was thinking about this today, you know, the fall of Fallujah over in Iraq. And why did that happen? It couldn't be that we pulled our troops out too soon. It's Mr. Bush's fault.

That's why the city is back in the hands of the very insurgents that we lost over 100 Marines and personnel taking and holding for eight years, nine years, and helping the Iraqis keep hold of. Well, now it's back in the hands of the insurgents. The very same guy with the very same name that they drove out of there is back in there.

It is as though we were never there. And so the families of these Marines are asking questions. What is going on? I lost my son.

I lost my husband. I lost my brother in Fallujah. The Marines, it's one of the signature efforts that the Marines have done in Iraq in the entire war, good, bad, or ugly, in terms of, you know, should we be there or not.

They expended a tremendous amount of effort and lost a lot of blood and a lot of lives over there, and now it is as though it never happened. What was my initial point tonight? Do you do what you do and measure your success by circumstances, or do you measure it by principle? If you're a Marine and you're given a mission and you accomplish your mission, no matter what it takes, you have observed principle. It doesn't matter how the circumstances turn out.

It doesn't invalidate your work if later on you think of all the hills that were taken in Vietnam and in Korea and in World War II and in many other battles that we fought. I have walked around on the empty, unpopulated, desolate beaches of Bataan and Corregidor. Hundreds and thousands of troops lost their lives there and later through the Bataan Death March in World War II.

And now it's uncontested ground. Nobody's worried about it. Nobody's after it.

No one's trying to hold it. The facilities and the emplacements, the great guns, Battery Geary and Battery Crockett and all these other great emplacements, these twisted, rusted pieces of scattered guns are laying around there. The Molenta Tunnel where General MacArthur and his family and his staff all lived for weeks and months is deserted.

It's empty, unlit when I was there. Just a hole under a hill with concrete. There's still old bunks and stuff in there from World War II, deserted, abandoned.

So was the effort wasted? If you measure it circumstantially, people would argue, what was the point? Look at the waste and the tragedy of war. But at the time, it was important. At the time, it made a difference.

At the time to hold and allow the larger pieces to move so that we could win that war, so that we could stop the Japanese, so that we could achieve peace and secure freedom and liberate the Philippines, which eventually happened. It was part of a larger thing. And now that that objective is secured, those intermediate objectives are no longer pertinent.

It is principle. You think about your life, and you think, what difference did it make that I was patient and held my tongue and didn't say nasty things? What difference does it make that I endured, that I kept my faith, and I maintained a good attitude in my mind and my heart as I went through some difficult times? Nobody noticed. Nobody saw it.

It wouldn't have been any different. What if I had done it differently? What if I had failed? What if I had succeeded? It doesn't seem to make a difference. Do not measure your success by circumstantial outcomes.

That's not the measure. The measure is, have I pleased my Father in Heaven? Have I reflected the glory of my Savior? Have I lived a life that reflects well on His work on my behalf? When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, will He say, well done? That's the measure. That's what counts.

What people say, you can be totally misunderstood. You can do the right thing and get vilified for it. There will be bitter, acrimonious resentment and hate and discontent.

You can be banished. You can be cold-shouldered. You can be blackballed.

You can be blacklisted. It can create rancor and rupture and all kinds of bad things. And you think, I'm standing on this principle, and look at how horrible it is.

This can't be God's will. Don't believe it. Principle, what is right and what is wrong, that's what we live for.

Do not measure your success by circumstantial outcome. Now, this works both ways. There are people who are hugely successful, who are basking in great wealth and great fame, great accomplishment, great luxury, great ease and seeming peace, and have anything they want whenever they want, as much as they want, do what they want.

I had a guy in some kind of $55,000 car almost run me off the road this afternoon because he was just out joyriding, having a good time. The rest of us were just unimportant traffic cones to his merriment. And so I looked both ways and pulled out of the parking garage, and this guy just goes, and he's weaving out and goes around a truck and runs a red light and goes down and gets on the tollway.

People are trying to keep from being wrecked by him. And he's just, I've got a fancy new car, one of these high dollar brands. And people like that, well, okay, so what about huge stadiums full of people? What about great megachurches with 60,000, 70,000 people all crammed into one place? Do we say they must be doing something right because look at their success? Look at their financial budget? It works both ways, doesn't it? You can do what is right.

You can't measure your rightness by the outcome. Sometimes it isn't going to come out that great circumstantially. And many times people are doing wrong and seem to be prospering.

Hence the question, why do the wicked prosper? So I don't need to state it again. You know what the principle is, right? This is the measure. This book that we have before us is the measure of success and failure.

It is the measure of right and wrong. It is the measure of true good and genuine evil. This is how we know, not how it seems to turn out from our myopic, short-term, limited perspective.

The wicked do not prosper. They may have a temporary joyride, but it's kind of like airplanes. It isn't coming down that's bad.

It's the impact. It's not the flying. It's when the flying stops.

And all of the rest of the flying doesn't matter if you crater at the end. And there is an ultimate judgment. There is an ultimate reckoning.

And the Lord Jesus told His disciples who sacrificed time with their families, gave up material goods, were persecuted, vilified, mocked. He said, if you have given these things up for my sake, in the resurrection there is a hundredfold and more for you. If you deny yourself and take up your cross, just like the Lord Jesus, it may not bode well in this life.

And most of us don't really pay a very high price. But look at where the Lord Jesus is now. The right hand of God the Father with all heaven as His domain, able to give all of those wonderful benefits listed in Revelation 2 and 3 to the overcomers.

That's the measure. So, the king of Israel says, alas, he's not judging by his great plan and his great strategy and the strength in numbers because he can no longer water the army or the supplies. So Jehoshaphat says, is there no prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of the Lord by him? Now, this would have been a wonderful idea a week ago, yes? Jehoram comes and says, hey, I'm going to go attack Moab, come with me.

Is there a prophet of the Lord we can ask to see if this is... He didn't do it then, but better late than never. A week later when they're out of water now, Jehoshaphat thinks, wow, maybe we ought to talk to the Lord. This is a good example of what we don't want to do.

The best time to pray and seek God's face and ask His blessing and look for His guidance and concentrate on and think about what His will might be is when we first undertake or consider

undertaking a thing. Not after we've waded in up to our nose and now we can't find a way out. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to Elisha.

So Elisha says, what have I to do with you? What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother. This is how I know they came along for the ride. Because he says, look, go down the encampment here.

Your Asherah prophets and your Baal prophets are just right down there. Why aren't you going and visiting them? Well, because I think Jehoram in his heart of hearts knows that they're great fair-weather prophets. If you want somebody to say, yes, go, it will all be great.

They're a wonderful group of yes-men, but they don't have actual answers in a crisis. No, the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab. Elisha said, as the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you.

And many times this is true in a household. You may be the only person in a group, in a situation, that cares anything about the Lord. The only one that's got any kind of active spiritual life.

God will regard the entire group based on your presence. This is BBA in my notes, blessing by association. It is an Old Testament principle.

It is a New Testament principle. Paul the Apostle talks about this same thing, that an entire household will be sanctified. Remember when he's talking about if you're unequally yoked, or if there's a couple and the wife comes to Christ, or the husband comes to Christ and the other spouse does not.

Paul says, God views that entire household as sanctified for the sake of the one. God will bless the spouse. God will bless the children, regardless of their attitude toward him, for the sake of the one.

This is like ten righteous men in Sodom. If there's even one there, the whole city is spared. The whole city is blessed.

Blessing by association. And this entire army, this three-part coalition is going to be blessed because there's one guy there, Jehoshaphat. And because of that, God is going to dictate victory and blessing on this entire misguided, misbegotten operation.

Just because of Jehoshaphat and because of his honoring of God's Word in days gone by. Even now, he's not really doing right. He's not making good decisions.

But, he is faithful enough. Bring me a musician. This is what we looked at last time.

When the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him. The hand of the Lord, of course, the hand represents power. We're going to see this a few verses down in this chapter.

And it's an interesting study we don't have time to do. But if you want something to amuse yourself with, by way of something to think about for your personal devotions or a little project on your own time, get a concordance and look up the hand of the Lord. You can do this online.

You can do it with Google. Just put it in quotes, hand of the Lord. And look at the passages and the context where the hand of the Lord was upon him.

We're going to see it a few more times in this book. The hand of the Lord came upon him. The hand of the Lord was upon him.

The hand of the Lord was with him. This is the power and the presence of God. But it's expressed as the hand.

Why? Because this is useful presence. Useful power. Your hand is what you get your work done with.

Right? This isn't a figurehead presence. This isn't a symbolic presence. It's not a flag or a banner or just a happy visage.

You know how in the Middle East a lot of times they carry big pictures of people that used to carry pictures of Yasser Arafat or pictures of the president of their country or whatever. Well, that's sort of a token presence, a nominal brand type of presence. It's just branding.

We're just associating ourselves. The hand of the Lord is operative. It is powerful.

It accomplishes things. So the hand of the Lord came upon him. He says, Thus says the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.

All right. So we got these three armies together. We got our spears and our shields and our helmets.

We got all of our battle equipment, our arrows, our archers, our bows. We all came down here and what we should have brought was shovels because the battle is going to be won with shovels. Who knew? What are we going to make these? They're probably out there digging with their spears and digging with their swords and digging with their daggers and taking arrows and scratching up the ground because God says excavate, dig into the ground.

Now, this is really such an interesting situation, much more so if you're looking at it in Hebrew. And we're going to see why after we pause and take our break. But remember, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

The Lord of many, many individuals. The Lord of the armies. The Lord of hosts.

Even though He's the Lord of hosts, it's not the numerical preponderance. It's not the strength and the weaponry and the potential. It's God's spirit.

The great thing about God's spirit is He can save by many or by few. He has the hosts if He chooses to use them. But when His spirit is present, even one guy, one righteous man can save a city.

And that's the principle that is going to be at work here. But we're going to actually end up back in our old friend, 66 chapter, miniature Bible, Isaiah, before we're done. We're going to find Elisha in Isaiah, believe it or not.

And we'll see that when we come back from the break.