

Prophets, Priests, and Kings: Desperate Times, Desperate Measures
2 Kings 3:1-27

Some Clues about the Point the Story

- On the surface, this seem like a simple miracle story:
 - The armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom were without water.
 - They turned to the Lord for water.
 - God miraculously gave them water.
- But there are clues that not all is well:
 - There chapter begins with an indictment of Jehoram and ends with the defeat of Jehoram.
 - Jehoram is clearly the (unjust) aggressor in this passage.

Do not harass Moab or contend with [Moab] in battle. (Deuteronomy 2:9)

- Elisha's words seem curiously at odds with the Law.

When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, 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? (Deuteronomy 20:19)

- Jehoshaphat's words have appeared before (Ahab's defeat).

And [Ahab] 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." (1 Kings 22:4)

And [Jehoram] 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. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." (2 Kings 3:7)

- The ending is strange—Mesha sacrificed his son, yet the wrath of God was against Israel.

Three Truths and Takeaways from the Story

- We see a damning portrait of convenient "faith".
 - Jehoram was not as bad as he could have been nor as righteous as he should have been.
 - We see evidence of his faithlessness in the passage...
 - He did not seek the Lord in prayer. (v. 6)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

- He blamed the Lord for his troubles. (vv. 10, 13)
- And we see evidence of his rejection from Elisha. (vv. 13-14)
- Application:
 - God means for us to a loving, dynamic relationship with Him.
 - We should pray for hearts that love the Lord, not just His gifts.
- We see a sobering portrait of God’s judgment.
 - V. 27 turns the tables in the chapter.

The war against Moab is a familiar story, and it should end with Israel gaining total victory over the rebellious Mesha, with Israel reducing Moab to its prior status as a vassal state in Israel, with Yahweh vindicating himself against the gods of the Gentiles....

If the story ended at 3:26, it would be comfortably, reassuringly familiar. But it goes on for another verse, and that verse deconstructs the story and disturbs our complacency, as the writer of Kings does habitually. We think we are reading another story about the crafty covenant Lord trapping his enemies, but when we reach 3:27, we realize we are reading a story about a doubly crafty God who traps Israel at the very moment he appears to be trapping Moab. (Peter Leithart)

- Even Elisha’s words were words of coming judgment. (v. 19)
- Application:
 - This passage illustrates the freedom and sovereignty of God in all things.
 - This passage illustrates that present blessings are no predictor of future blessings.
- We see a hopeful portrait of Christ’s mercy.

Second Kings 3 does not leave us with an arbitrary God, but it certainly does not reveal a tame God. This story leaves us precisely where the whole of Scripture leaves us: utterly dependent upon the God who is sovereign love and sovereign good. This odd and mystifying story urges us to take one stance in life: trust him, remembering that the greatest surprise ending is the double surprise of the gospel—the shocking horror of the Son of the King crucified outside the walls by his own “fathers” and the wild joy of a risen Lord. (Peter Leithart)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” (John 7:37-38)