

"Digging Ditches"

2 Kings 3:1-27

Introduction: Tonight, in our study of "The Life and the Miracles of Elisha" we are going to see a miracle that Elisha was connected with and this a miracle that few people are familiar with and many times it is read over and missed. The miracle is found at the end of 2 Kings 3 but to grasp the meaning we need to consider the entire chapter.

I. The Background

Notice 2 Kings 3:1

This miracle takes place under the reign of two different kings. Jehoram is the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat is king of Judah. The Kingdom is divided at this time. The northern kingdom (Israel) was deep into idolatry and the southern kingdom (Judah) still retained, to some extent, devotion to Jehovah. Israel had been under the reign of Ahab, but Ahab was killed in battle and so at this time his son Jehoram has inherited the throne. Jehoram was an evil king but not as evil as his father and mother.

Notice 2 Kings 3:2

His parents were Ahab and Jezebel. The Bible tells us they were extremely wicked in all they did.

1 Kings 21:25

²⁵ But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

Up in the northern kingdom, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were two of the most evil people in the Bible. Their son became the heir to the throne; and when King Ahab was killed, Jehoram ascended to the throne and he was evil, though not as evil as his father. Down in Judah, the reigning king at the time was named Jehoshaphat; and he was a relatively good king. Now, in this chapter, the two of them are going to join their armies to attack the nation of Moab, and they also recruit the king of Edom and his army; but things don't go as planned; and this chapter is about what happened.

Notice 2 Kings 3:2-3

Jehoram had put away the image of Baal which Ahab had made but he still cleaved to the sins of Jeroboam. Let me show you what these sins were.

1 Kings 12:25-30

²⁵ *Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel.*

²⁶ *And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:*

²⁷ *If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.*

²⁸ *Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

²⁹ *And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.*

³⁰ *And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.*

Jeroboam set up the two golden calves out of fear of losing people to the southern kingdom and when Jehoram became king he kept the golden calves probably for the same reason, he did not want to see the people leave.

Notice 2 Kings 3:4-5

Under the reign of Ahab, Mesha the king of Moab was required to pay tribute to Israel but when Ahab died he made the choice to rebel and stand up against Jehoram.

Under the leadership of David, the Moabites were the servants of Israel.

2 Samuel 8:1-2

And after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them: and David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines.

² *And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.*

This continued right up until the death of Ahab. This revolt is all about the sin that Ahab and his sons were involved in. Ahab did not see the revolt but he was certainly one of the reasons Moab rebelled. This brings to mind a verse from Proverbs.

Proverbs 16:7

⁷ *When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

The flipside of this verse is also true and that is what we see here. When a man turns his back upon God and his ways are displeasing to God we can be sure that there will be evil from every direction. That is what we see here.

Let us now notice how Jehoram responded.

Notice 2 Kings 3:6

His response was twofold and here we see his first response to Moab's rebellion. He went out and he numbered his military. This is very sad. He never turned to the Lord nor did he seek the golden calves that had been set up, so he apparently had no faith in them either. He numbered his men because that is where his trust was at.

Application:

This is a sad picture of the unsaved in our world today. When problems arise they immediately turn to their own resources to find comfort. They have no Comforter in their sorrow, they have no Counsellor in times of confusion, they have no Rock of refuge when the storms of life strike, and they have no peace from the One who gives peace that is beyond understanding. They are left to their resources and their wisdom. Is it any wonder there are so many people today who battle with depression in this society that surrounds us?

Notice 2 Kings 3:7

His is the second way in which Jehoram responded. He sent messengers to Jehoshaphat requesting his presence in the battle.

Now there are those who say that when Jehoram put away the image of Baal it was a strategic political move because he knew Jehoshaphat was a God-fearing man and if he wanted his assistance he would need to do something that made it appear as though he had changed, and he was not like his father.

When he sent the messengers, Jehoshaphat made a full commitment to come alongside of Jehoram. This seems to be a strange move because he had been rebuked earlier for joining with Ahab. Let me show you what he had done.

2 Chronicles 18:1-3

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

² And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead.

³ *And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.*

Now let me show you the rebuke.

2 Chronicles 19:1-2

And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.

² *And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.*

So, the question is, "Why would he chose to join forces with the son of Ahab?" There could have been several reasons.

1. Jehoshaphat had a zeal to see heal the divide between the two kingdoms.
2. The Moabites were a common enemy.
3. He was deceived by the actions of Jehoram when he put away the image of Baal.

Whatever the reason we must not miss the fact that he did not seek the wisdom of God and for that reason he became caught in a very uncomfortable position.

Let me show you another account where the counsel of God was not sought out.

Joshua 9:14-15

¹⁴ *And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.*

¹⁵ *And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.*

Joshua and the leaders of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites and entered a treaty with them which was not the will of God.

Application:

We are not sure why Jehoshaphat joined with Jehoram, but it was most likely an attempt to heal the divide. Let us be careful. Many people have desired to see something happen and they wanted it so much that they threw aside common sense, they ignored the warnings in God's Word and they never prayed about the matter.

Notice 2 Kings 3:8-9

They decided to go through the wilderness of Edom and as they did they joined up with the king of Edom and after 7 days they ran out of water. There is so much here for us to see but time does not permit so we shall hit the high points.

There is a picture within this text that I want to show you. Edom was a name given to Esau.

Genesis 25:30

³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Esau was the twin brother of Jacob and the two men represent to the two natures with the believer.

Genesis 25:22-23

²² And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

²³ And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

So, Edom represents the flesh and when Jehoram and Jehosaphat made the choice to go through Edom this then is a picture of the believer who is walking in the flesh. The fact that they ran out of water is a picture of how the believer who lives for the flesh will never find any satisfaction or contentment in this world, they will always find themselves wanting.

Notice 2 Kings 3:10

When they ran out of water Jehoram immediately thought they had been led there by God for the purpose of destruction. This is the way believers outside the will of God live. This is what guilt does in the mind. Every time something happens guilt makes the individual outside the will of God think it is the consequence of how they are living. This is the torment of a guilty conscience.

Proverbs 19:3

³ The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

Notice 2 Kings 3:11

Here we see a contrast. Jehosaphat was not looking for judgment, but he sought the mercy of God. The thoughts of the two men are in contrast here. The Godly man rests in the Lord's mercy while the guilty man is tormented by his guilt.

Jehoshaphat knew they needed to seek the wisdom of Elisha the man of God.

Notice 2 Kings 3:12-14

Elisha would only help them because of the presence of Jehoshaphat. Let me show you the words of one man on the thought here;

"Little do the unrighteous realize how much they owe, under God, to the presence of the righteous in their midst."

I am here reminded of the Words of our Lord when he said that believers are the salt of the earth (preservative) and the light of the world.

Notice 2 Kings 3:15

Elisha requested a player of a stringed instrument. The music calmed his mind and it was while the music played that the hand of the Lord came upon him.

Notice 2 Kings 3:16-19

Now we are getting to the miracle. They were to dig ditches in the valley and God would then send the water from an unknown source.

I can imagine the questions in the minds of the soldiers. Here you have platoons of soldiers who are thirsty and hot and dry and upset. They want some guidance from their generals, and suddenly this command filters down through the ranks. Take your personal shovels and start digging trenches and ditches in the red-rock desert of Edom. It was a lot of work, and it seemed to be senseless. But the order was firm, and the men obeyed. Perhaps they thought they were digging battle trenches. But soon the trenches and ditches were shimmering with cool, life-giving water. They had done the work, and God had supplied the water. **They had done the possible, and God had done the impossible. They had obeyed the command, and God had sent the blessing.**

Notice the words of an Robert Morgan;

"When I was a boy, my parents used to tell me to study hard in school, to be diligent, to do my lessons, or else, they said, I would grow up to dig ditches. Somehow ditch digging was at the bottom rung. It was always, you don't want to grow up to dig ditches.

And now I've grown up, and all I am is a ditch digger after all. In fact, all we are doing here at this church is digging ditches and asking God to fill them. All we do in our personal lives and ministries, if we do anything at all for God, is to dig ditches and trust that God is going to supply the living water.

Let me give you one example. Florence Littauer is a popular Christian motivational speaker who has ministered to women and to groups around the world. She sometimes tells about one of her first speaking engagements. She was a new Christian, and she was asked to speak at a retreat near Mount Shasta, California. She prepared her notes very carefully, but when she arrived she discovered the campgrounds and cabins were extremely primitive and rustic. Her idea of camp was to open the window of the Holiday Inn, and so she was far from delighted at the arrangements. Then she learned that her opening message was to be given outdoors, in the dark, by the campfire. It never dawned on her she shouldn't have a podium and lights and a microphone. But there she was, by the crackling fire, for the service. And then the fire went out and the mosquitoes came out. Some voice in the darkness introduced her, and she found herself trying to speak in virtually pitch blackness without any sound system; but she did her best and ended by asking those present to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. There was no apparent response, and as the years passed she began speaking in bigger and brighter arenas and she forgot all about that humble beginning on the rocks in the darkness.

Eighteen years passed, and Florence was speaking at a large retreat for women in an elegant hotel. A woman approached her. "Do you remember sharing your testimony at Mount Shasta State Park?" asked the woman. "It was the night in the dark that I prayed with you to receive Christ. I'd been looking for God, but I'd never seen Him in the light. Somehow the protection of darkness gave me courage, and I dared to ask Jesus into my life without letting anyone know."

The woman went on to describe the changes in her life and the Christian ministry God had given her, and she ended by saying, "Thank you for being willing to come to the state park and speak. Your obedience to God changed the direction of my life."

Notice 2 Kings 3:20-25

God used the water in the ditches to confound and defeat the enemy.

Conclusion:

We need to be busy digging ditches for God. Every time we speak up for the Lord or give out a Bible tract or witness, or help our children memorize a Bible verse, or do an act of kindness in Jesus' name, we're digging ditches for Him. And we depend on Him to fill the ditches with the water of life. We can't do that part. We can't transform or change or win or save. We can't send down the water of life; but we can dig the ditches. Let us be determined to spend the rest of our lives digging ditches for Jesus Christ—and asking Him to fill them with water. As we dig the ditches and God fills them let us remember what happened in this miracle. As God provided the water, it not only gave life to His people; it confused and frustrated the enemy and brought about the victory.