

# CHAPTER 3

We are now called to attend the public affairs of Israel, in which we shall find Elisha concerned. Here is,

- I. The general character of Jehoram, king of Israel (v. 1-3).
- II. A war with Moab, in which Jehoram and his allies were engaged (v. 4-8).
- III. The straits which the confederate army were reduced to in their expedition against Moab, and their consulting Elisha in that distress, with the answer of peace he gave them (v. 9-19).
- IV. The glorious issue of this campaign (v. 20-25) and the barbarous method the king of Moab took to oblige the confederate army to retire (v. 26, 27). The house of Ahab is doomed to destruction; and, though in this chapter we have both its character and its condition better than before, yet the threatened ruin is not far off.

## 2 KINGS 3:1-5

### THE REIGN OF JEHORAM

Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and brother of Ahaziah, is here upon the throne of Israel; and, though he was but a bad man, yet two commendable things are here recorded of him: —

I. That he removed his father's idols. He did evil in many things, but not like his father Ahab or his mother Jezebel, v. 2. Bad he was, but not so bad, so *overmuch wicked*, as Solomon speaks, <sup><1077></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:17. Perhaps Jehoshaphat, though by his alliance with the house of Ahab he made his own family worse, did something towards making Ahab's better. Jehoram saw his father and brother cut off for worshipping Baal, and wisely took warning by God's judgments on them, and *put away the image of Baal*, resolving to worship the God of Israel only, and consult none but his prophets. So far was well, yet it did not prevent the destruction of Ahab's family, nay, that destruction came *in his days*, and fell immediately upon him (<sup><1024></sup>2 Kings 9:24), though he was one of the best of the family,

for then the measure of its iniquity was full. Jehoram's reformation was next to none; for,

**1.** He only put away the image of Baal *which his father had made*, and this probably in compliment to Jehoshaphat, who otherwise would not have come into confederacy with him, any more than with his brother, <sup><1234></sup>1 Kings 22:49. But he did not destroy the worship of Baal among the people, for Jehu found it prevalent, <sup><2009></sup>2 Kings 10:19. It was well to reform his family, but it was not enough; he ought to have used his power for the reforming of his kingdom.

**2.** When he put away the image of Baal, he adhered to the worship of the calves, that politic sin of Jeroboam, v. 3. *He departed not therefrom*, because that was the state engine by which the division between the two tribes was supported. Those do not truly, nor acceptably, repent or reform, who only part with the sins that they lose by, but continue their affection to the sins that they get by.

**3.** He only *put away* the image of Baal, he did not break it in pieces, as he ought to have done. He laid it aside for the present, yet not knowing but he might have occasion for it another time; and Jezebel, for reasons of state, was content to worship her Baal in private.

**II.** That he did what he could to recover his brother's losses. As he had something more of the religion of an Israelite than his father, so he had something more of the spirit of a king than his brother. Moab rebelled against Israel, immediately upon the death of Ahab, <sup><1000></sup>2 Kings 1:1. And we do not find that Ahaziah made any attempt to chastise or reduce them, but tamely let go his interest in them, rather than entertain the cares, undergo the fatigues, and run the hazards, of a war with them. His folly and pusillanimity herein, and his indifference to the public good, were the more aggravated because the tribute which the king of Moab paid was a very considerable branch of the revenue of the crown of Israel: 100,000 *lambs*, and 100,000 *wethers*, v. 4. The riches of kings then lay more in cattle than coin, and they thought it not below them to *know the state of their flocks and herds* themselves, because, as Solomon observes, *the crown doth not endure to every generation*, <sup><10723></sup>Proverbs 27:23, 24. Taxes were then paid not so much in money as in the commodities of the country, which was an ease to the subject, whether it was an advantage to the prince or no. The revolt of Moab was a great loss to Israel, yet Ahaziah sat still in

sloth and ease. But an upper chamber in his house proved as fatal to him as the high places of the field could have been (~~1191~~2 Kings 1:2), and the breaking of his lattice let into his throne a man of the more active genius, that would not lose the dominion of Moab without making at least one push for its preservation.

## ~~1191~~2 KINGS 3:6-19

### THE EXPEDITION AGAINST MOAB

Jehoram has no sooner got the sceptre into his hand than he takes the sword into his hand, to reduce Moab. Crowns bring great cares and perils to the heads that wear them; no sooner in honour than in war. Now here we have,

**I.** The concerting of this expedition between Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoram levied an army (v. 6), and such an opinion he had of the godly king of Judah that,

**1.** He courted him to be his confederate: *Wilt thou go with me against Moab?* And he gained him. Jehoshaphat said, *I will go up. I am as thou art*, v. 7. Judah and Israel, though unhappily divided from each other, yet can unite against Moab a common enemy. Jehoshaphat upbraids them not with their revolt from the house of David, nor makes it an article of their alliance that they shall return to their allegiance, though he had good reason to insist upon it, but treats with Israel as a sister-kingdom. Those are no friends to their own peace and strength who can never find in their hearts to forgive and forget an old injury, and unite with those that have formerly broken in upon their rights. *Quod initio non vulvit, tractu temporis invalescit* — *That which was originally destitute of authority in the progress of time acquires it.*

**2.** He consulted him as his confidant, v. 8. He took advice of Jehoshaphat, who had more wisdom and experience than himself, which way they should make their descent upon the country of Moab; and he advised that they should not march against them the nearest way, over Jordan, but go round *through the wilderness of Edom*, that they might take the king of Edom (who was tributary to him) and his forces along with them. If two be better than one, much more will not a *three-fold cord be easily broken*.

Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dearly for joining with Ahab, yet he joined with his son, and this expedition also had like to have been fatal to him. There is nothing got by being yoked with unbelievers.

**II.** The great straits that the army of the confederates was reduced to in this expedition. Before they saw the face of an enemy they were all in danger of perishing for want of water, v. 9. This ought to have been considered before they ventured a march through the wilderness, the same wilderness (or very near it) where their ancestors wanted water, <sup><001B></sup>Numbers 20:2. God suffers his people, by their own improvidence, to bring themselves into distress, that the wisdom, power, and goodness of his providence may be glorified in their relief. What is more cheap and common than water? It is *drink to every beast of the field*, <sup><0041B></sup>Psalm 104:11. Yet the want of it will soon humble and ruin kings and armies. The king of Israel sadly lamented the present distress, and the imminent danger it put them in of falling into the hands of their enemies the Moabites, to whom, when weakened by thirst, they would be an easy prey, v. 10. it was he that had *called these kings together*; yet he charges it upon Providence, and reflects upon that as unkind: The Lord has *called them together*. Thus *the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord*, <sup><000B></sup>Proverbs 19:3.

**III.** Jehoshaphat's good motion to ask counsel of God in this exigency, v. 11. The place they were now in could not but remind them of the *wonders of which their fathers told them*, the waters fetched out of the rock for Israel's seasonable supply. The thought of this, we may suppose, encouraged Jehoshaphat to ask, *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord*, like unto Moses? He was the more concerned because it was by his advice that they fetched this compass through the wilderness, v. 8. It was well that Jehoshaphat enquired of the Lord now, but it would have been much better if he had done it sooner, before he engaged in this war, or steered this course; so the distress might have been prevented. Good men are sometimes remiss and forgetful, and neglect their duty till necessity and affliction drive them to it.

**IV.** Elisha recommended as a proper person for them to consult with v. 11. And here we may wonder,

**1.** That Elisha should follow the camp, especially in such a tedious march as this, as a volunteer, unasked, unobserved, and in no post of honour at

all; not in the office of *priest of the war* (<sup><6710></sup>Deuteronomy 20:2) or president of the council of war, but in such obscurity that none of the kings knew they had such a jewel in the treasures of their camp, nor so good a friend in their retinue. We may suppose it was by special direction from heaven that Elisha attended the war, as *the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof*. Thus does God anticipate his people with the blessings of his goodness and provide his oracles for those that provide them not for themselves. It would often be bad with us if God did not take more care of us, both for soul and body, than we take for ourselves.

**2.** That a servant of the king of Israel knew of his being there when the king himself did not. Probably it was such a servant as Obadiah was to his father Ahab, one that *feared the Lord*; to such a one Elisha made himself known, not to the kings. The account he gives of him is that it was he that *poured water on the hands of Elijah*, that is, he was his servant, and particularly attended him when he washed his hands. He that will be great, let him learn to minister: he that will rise high, let him begin low.

**V.** The application which the kings made to Elisha. They went down to him to his quarters, v. 12. Jehoshaphat had such an esteem for a prophet with whom the word of the Lord was that he would condescend to visit him in his own person and not send for him up to him. The other two were moved by the straits they were in to make their court to the prophet. He that humbled himself was thus exalted, and looked great, when three kings came to knock at his door, and beg his assistance; see (<sup><6180></sup>Revelation 3:9).

**VI.** The entertainment which Elisha gave them.

**1.** He was very plain with the wicked king of Israel (v. 13): “*What have I to do with thee? How canst thou expect an answer of peace from me? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother, whom thou hast countenanced and maintained in thy prosperity, and let them help thee now in thy distress.*” Elisha was not imposed upon, as Jehoshaphat was, by his partial and hypocritical reformation; he knew that, though he had put away the image of Baal, Baal's prophets were still dear to him, and perhaps some of the were now in his camp. “Go,” said he, “*go to them. Get you to the gods whom you have served,*” (<sup><6704></sup>Judges 10:14. The world and the flesh have ruled you, let them help you; why should God be *enquired of by you?*” (<sup><3448></sup>Ezekiel 14:3. Elisha tells him to his face, in a holy indignation at his wickedness, that he can scarcely find in his heart to *look towards him* or

to *see him*, v. 14. Jehoram is to be respected as a prince, but as a wicked man he is a vile person, and is to be condemned, <sup><915></sup>Psalm 15:4. Elisha, as a subject, will honour him, but as a prophet he will cause him to know his iniquity. For those that had such an extraordinary commission it was fit (though not for a common person) to say to a king, *Thou art wicked*, <sup><834></sup>Job 34:18. Jehoram has so much self-command as to take this plain dealing patiently; he cares not now for hearing of the prophets of Baal, but is a humble suitor to the God of Israel and his prophet, representing the present case as very deplorable and humbly recommending it to the prophet's compassionate consideration. In effect, he owns himself unworthy, but let not the other kings be ruined for his sake.

**2.** Elisha showed a great respect to the godly king of Judah, *regarded his presence*, and, for his sake, would *enquire of the Lord* for them all. It is good being with those that have God's favour and his prophet's love. Wicked people often fare the better for the friendship and society of those that are godly.

**3.** He composed himself to receive instructions from God. His mind was somewhat ruffled and disturbed at the sight of Jehoram; though he was not put into a sinful heat or passion, nor had spoken unadvisedly, yet his zeal for the present indisposed him for prayer and the operations of the Spirit, which required a mind very calm and sedate. He therefore called for a musician (v. 15), a devout musician, one accustomed to play upon his harp and sign psalms to it. To hear God's praises sweetly sung, as David had appointed, would cheer his spirits, and settle his mind, and help to put him into a right frame both to speak to him and to hear from him. We find a company of prophets prophesying with *a psaltery and a tabret before them*, <sup><905></sup>1 Samuel 10:5. Those that desire communion with God must keep their spirits quiet and serene. Elisha being refreshed, and having the tumult of his spirits laid by this divine music, *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, and his visit did him more honour than that of three kings.

**4.** God, by him, gave them assurance that the issue of the present distress would be comfortable and glorious.

**(1.)** They should speedily be supplied with water, v. 16, 17. To try their faith and obedience, he bids them *make the valley full of ditches* to receive the water. Those that expect God's blessings must prepare room for them, *dig the pools* for the rain to fill, as they did in the valley of Baca, and so made even that a well, <sup><806></sup>Psalm 84:6. To raise the wonder, he tells them

they shall have water enough, and yet there shall be *neither wind nor rain*. Elijah, by prayer, obtained water out of the clouds, but Elisha fetches it nobody knows whence. The spring of these waters shall be as secret as the head of the Nile. God is not tied to second causes. Ordinarily it is by a plentiful rain that God *confirms his inheritance* (~~3609~~ Psalm 68:9), but here it is done without rain, at least without rain in that place. Some of the *fountains of the great deep*, it is likely, *were broken up* on this occasion; and, to increase the miracle, *that valley only* (as it should seem) *was filled with water*, and no other place had any share of it.

(2.) That supply should be an earnest of victory (v. 18): “*This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord*; you shall not only be saved from perishing, but shall return in triumph.” As God gives freely to the unworthy, so he gives richly, like himself, more than we are *able to ask or think*. His grants out-do our requests and expectations. Those that sincerely seek for the dew of God's grace shall have it, and by it be made *more than conquerors*. It is promised that they shall be masters of the rebellious country, and they are permitted to lay it waste and ruin it, v. 19. The law forbade them to fell fruit-trees to be employed in their sieges (~~3119~~ Deuteronomy 20:19), but not when it was intended, in justice, for the starving of a country that had forfeited its fruits, by denying *tribute to those to whom tribute was due*.

## ~~1311~~ 2 KINGS 3:20-27

### THE DEFEAT OF THE MOABITES

**I.** We have here the divine gift of both those things which God had promised by Elisha — water and victory, and the former not only a pledge of the latter, but a means of it. God, who created, and commands, all the waters, both above and beneath the firmament, sent them an abundance of water on a sudden, which did them double service.

**1.** It relieved their armies, which were ready to perish, v. 20. And, which was very observable, this relief came just at the time of the *offering of the morning sacrifice* upon the altar at Jerusalem, a certain time, and universally known. That time Elisha chose for his *hour of prayer* (it is likely *looking towards the temple*, for so there were to do in their prayers when they were *going out to battle* and encamped at a distance, ~~1084~~ 1 Kings 8:44), in token of his communion with the temple-service, and his

expectation of success by virtue of the great sacrifice. We now cannot pitch upon any hour more acceptable than another, because our high priest is always appearing for us, to present and plead his sacrifice. That time God chose for the hour of mercy to put an honour upon the daily sacrifice, which had been despised. God answered Daniel's prayer just at the *time of the evening sacrifice* (<sup><2021></sup>Daniel 9:21); for he will acknowledge his own institutions.

**2.** It deceived their enemies, who were ready to triumph, into the destruction. Notice was given to the Moabites of the advances of the confederate army, to oppose which *all that were able to put on armour* were posted upon the frontiers, where they were ready to give the Israelites a warm reception (v. 21), promising themselves that it would be easy dealing with an army fatigued by so long a march through the wilderness of Edom. But see here,

**(1.)** How easily they were drawn into their own delusions. Observe the steps of their self-deceit.

**[1.]** They saw the water in the valley where the army of Israel encamped, and conceited it was blood (v. 22), because they knew the valley to be dry, and (there having been no rain) could not imagine it should be water. The sun shone upon it, and probably *the sky was red and lowering*, a presage of *foul weather that day* (<sup><1013></sup>Matthew 16:3), and so it proved to them. But, this making the water look red, their own fancies, which made them willing to believe what made for them, suggested, *This is blood*, God permitting them thus to impose upon themselves.

**[2.]** If their camp was thus full of blood, they conclude, “Certainly the kings have fallen out (as confederates of different interests are apt to do) and they have *slain one another* (v. 23), for who else should slay them?” And,

**[3.]** “If the armies have slain one another, we have nothing to do but to divide the prey. *Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.*” These were the gradual suggestions of some sanguine spirits among them, that thought themselves wiser and happier in their conjectures than their neighbours; and the rest, being desirous it should be so, were forward to believe it was so. *Quod volumus facile credimus — What we wish we readily believe.* Thus those that are to be destroyed are first deceived (<sup><6113></sup>Revelation 20:8), and none are so effectually deceived as those that deceive themselves.



(2.) How fatally they thereby ran upon their own destruction. They rushed carelessly into the camp of Israel, to plunder it, but were undeceived when it was too late. The Israelites, animated by the assurances Elisha had given them of victory, fell upon them with the utmost fury, routed them, and pursued them into their own country (v. 24), which they laid waste (v. 25), destroyed the cities, marred the ground, stopped up the wells, felled the timber, and left only the royal city standing, in the walls of which they made great breaches with their battering engines. This they got by rebelling against Israel. Who ever *hardened his heart against God and prospered?*

II. In the close of the chapter we are told what the king of Moab did when he found himself reduced to the last extremity by the besiegers, and that his capital city was likely to fall into their hands.

1. He attempted that which was bold and brave. he got together 700 choice men, and with them sallied out upon the intrenchments of the king of Edom, who, being but a mercenary in this expedition, would not, he hoped, make any great resistance if vigorously attacked, and so he might make his escape that way. But it would not do; even the king of Edom proved too hard for him, and obliged him to retire, v. 26.

2. This failing, he did that which was brutish and barbarous; he took his own son, his eldest son, that was to succeed him, than whom nothing could be more dear to himself and his people, and *offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall*, v. 27. He designed by this,

(1.) To obtain the favour of Chemosh his god, which, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer any thing was to them the more acceptable those idolaters thought it must needs be if offered in sacrifice to their gods, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honour.

(2.) To terrify the besiegers, and oblige them to retire. Therefore he did it *upon the wall*, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dearly he would sell his city and life. He intended hereby to render them odious, and to exasperate and enrage his own subjects against them. This effect it had: *There was great indignation against Israel* for driving him to this extremity, whereupon they raised the siege and returned. Tender and generous spirits will not do that, though just, which will drive any man distracted, or make him desperate.