

# Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 18, Part 1

## 2 Kings 3-4, Part 1

© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

The covenant on the ground. I haven't talked about this recently, but in the books of Kings, we see the examination of how Israel fulfilled her covenant that had first been made with God there on Mount Sinai. The title, the covenant on the ground, is a bit of a pun because, on the one hand, it is the covenant in operation on the ground.

But in another sense, it's the covenant that has fallen to the ground, as we see again and again the Kings of Israel and many of the Kings of Judah having failed to keep their covenant. We're looking at the narrative of Elijah and Elisha this time.

I have argued earlier and want to continue that today, it's not two different ministries. It's really one ministry in two different phases, with two rather different central figures. Yet, one goal is to be certain that Baal does not replace Yahweh as the God of the northern kingdom, Israel, and, by extension, of the southern kingdom, Judah.

So, we saw last time the conclusion of Elijah's lifetime and ministry and the introduction of Elisha. We continue now today as we look at chapters three and four, and we're seeing the ministry of Elisha and especially in terms of what we would label the miraculous. We begin with the attack on Moab.

As the handout indicates, Moab revolted against Ahab or, excuse me, against Israel after the death of Ahab. We're told that there in the early verses of chapter three, following verse four and following Moab had been subject to Israel from the time of David onward. And so, for some hundred years or more, almost 200 years, Moab has been a subject.

But now, with the death of Ahab, they see their opportunity, and they revolt. Ahab, you remember, was replaced by his son Ahaziah, but he only ruled about six months before he died of the injuries that he got when he fell through the latticework in the temple in, excuse me, in his palace. And he's replaced by his brother, a second son of Ahab, Jehoram or Joram.

And it appears that very quickly, Joram moved to try to regain control over Moab. He called upon Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to assist him and Jehoshaphat in the same words that Jehoshaphat had used with his father. Ahab says, oh, I'm your man.

I'm on your side. Everything that I have is yours. How shall we proceed? And Jehoram said we're going to go south.

If we look at the map, Moab is here on the east side of the Dead Sea. So, the easiest access from Samaria would be down this way and attack from the north. But Jehoram says, no, I want to go south.

I want to go through Judah, and I want to come around through Edom. Edom, at this time, is still a vassal of Judah. And so you have the three kings, the king of Israel, the king of Judah and the king of Edom.

So, they're coming around. Perhaps the idea of a surprise attack or also this southern border probably was much more weakly defended than the northern border. So that's the idea.

We're coming from the south. But the Bible tells us that after a seven-day journey, they were without water. Now, I want you to notice a couple of things about Jehoram.

Notice that, first of all, there in verses two and three, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father and mother had done. Of Ahaziah, it was said, yes, he did the same things his father and mother had done. But Jehoram, for whatever reason, is backing off a bit from that very intense worship of Baal.

And in fact, we're told he got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father Ahab had made. So, there's some sense of devotion and loyalty to Yahweh here. Interesting.

But when the crisis comes, when they're out of water, look at his response. He says, has the Lord, this is in verse 10, has the Lord called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab? What does he think about Yahweh's motivation toward him and his two compatriots? He thinks Yahweh is out to get him. Whenever something bad happens, oh, Yahweh is out to get me.

Where does that come from? It comes from double-mindedness. We've talked about this before. The idea, yes, is that I want to keep one foot in Yahweh, but I want to keep one foot in the world as well.

When you do that, whenever something bad happens, the tendency is to say, oh, God's out to get me. That's what's happening here. And we see that kind of attitude in this situation.

The only way to really be confident of God. It is to be flat out for him. Then, you know that if difficulty or evil or problems come to you, surely they came through the hand of Yahweh. Nothing happens to us without his permissive will.

But having come through his hands, he has good planned. And you see a bit of that in Jehoshaphat's response. Jehoshaphat asked, is there no prophet of the Lord here

through whom we may inquire of the Lord? Well, let's find out what God has in mind here. Let's find out what God might be intending to do for us or with us through this problem.

I think the two different responses of Joram and Jehoshaphat are very significant. So, when disaster comes. If our hearts are fully his, then our response is, Lord, what do you want to do through this? What do you want to accomplish through this? In fact.

This event gave an opportunity to Yahweh to demonstrate his divine provision for his people. Once again, I want to be very careful here. I do not want to say God sends trouble into your life.

He's not that kind of a God, but does God permit trouble to come into our lives? Yes, he does. Yes, he does. And when he does.

He then has the ability to demonstrate his power, demonstrate his care, and perhaps his ability to enable us to stand in the face of it. But if it comes to us, it does not come because God is out to get us. Now, if we are living a double-minded life, then it may well be that God permits that evil to come precisely to shock us, precisely to call us back to him.

But he always has good purposes in mind. This is what James says when he says, don't ever say you are tempted by God. Now, that's a kind of a tricky statement because in Hebrew, to test and to tempt are really the same concept; they're the same word. We in English, of course, have divided these tempt means to induce to do evil, and James is absolutely right when he says, don't ever say that God is tempting you in the sense of trying to get you to do wrong. On the other hand, does God test us? Oh, yes.

And this is what Paul means when he says that there has no temptation taken you, but such as is common to human beings. Whatever test may come in your life, whatever challenge, whatever difficulty, God has given you a way to escape, a way to triumph through it.

So that's the difference. Does God test us? Yes, he does. Does he tempt us in our modern English sense? No, never.

So, in a real way, I think we can say this is a test, but Joram says, God's out to get us. God brought us down here to get us. That's what kind of a God he is.

You can't trust him. Joseph says, wait, wait, wait, let's find out what God might be planning to do here. Now, it's interesting.

Joshua doesn't know that Elisha is with them. Joram doesn't know. But one of the officers.

How interesting. Elisha obviously is not making a big deal of himself or of his presence, and we don't know why he's along. Whether the Lord directed him to go along or what we don't know.

But Elisha is pretty blunt. He says to Joram, well, why don't you try the gods of your father and your mother? Why don't you try those prophets? Again, we're dealing with a double-minded man here. He goes on and he says, if it weren't for Josaphat here, I wouldn't have anything to do with you.

Woof. But he says, because Josaphat is here, I will. And it's interesting.

This is one place in the Bible where it appears that the prophet is seeking to get into some sort of a trance state. He asked for a harpist to come and play music. Now, this is typical among the prophets in the ancient world.

They seek to be possessed. And I would I would simply caution you here. It doesn't say he sought to be possessed.

He just said. Bring somebody to play music. So be careful how much we read into some of these passages, but in any case, this is the only place.

Every place else is simply a straightforward dialogue between God and the prophet, God giving his word to the prophet and the prophet then conveying that word to the world. And so, he says, you won't see this is verse 17, you won't see wind or rain. Yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle, and your animals will drink.

This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord. And he's not going to stop there. He's going to deliver Moab into your hands.

So, God brought you into this situation in order to display his mighty provision. He brought you into these circumstances to remind you that he's on your side and he's for you. Now, again, if we look at our map, Moab, excuse me, Edom and Edom is the land south of Judah around the end of the Dead Sea.

Over into the mountains on the east side of this valley, very dry, very, very dry. So the fact that there was no water there is not surprising. But the fact that the land would be running with water.

Oh, my. How amazing. Now, again, when we talk about miracles, we tend to say if we can find some sort of a natural explanation.

Ah, well, OK, I feel a lot better. It really wasn't miraculous. It is possible there was a great rainstorm in these hills.

And as happens in virtually any desert, you have the water running off the land suddenly. And it ran down and filled this valley. But that's not the issue.

The issue of a miracle is not how. The issue of a miracle is when and to what degree. When God said it would happen, it happened.

And it happened to the degree that God said where there's water running all over the land. That's our God. Now, the next verse, verse 18, is troublesome.

Excuse me, verse 19. You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones.

Oh, my. Why would God command things like that? Well, look at the language. He doesn't command it.

It's an observation of what they are going to do. Now, to be sure, they might very well say, well, the prophet said we're going to do it. So, we're going to do it.

I don't think we need to push it too far. But later on, Elisha will look at Hazael, the king of Syria, whom Elisha is anointing to be the next king of Syria. And he weeps.

And Hazael says, why are you weeping? And he says because I see what you are going to do to my people, Israel. Is he commanding him to do it? No. He's simply observing.

Oh, dear. This is what's going to happen. And I think we need to be careful here.

God is not commanding them to do this. But Elisha is saying, I see you are going to do it. God is going to give you Moab.

And I see what you are going to do. I think we can say that in light of some of the commandments that God gives in Deuteronomy, this is not the kind of thing God wants them to do. But Elisha, with the foreknowledge given by God, sees this as what they're going to do.

Let me take a moment to talk about that. Just because God permits us to do something doesn't mean that's what we should do. Every open door in your life is not necessarily the door you should go through.

And sometimes we see this open door and say, well, of course, since God gave me that possibility, I'll do it. But God wants us to be in contact with him and to be saying,

God, is that what you want? Is that what you want to accomplish in your life? Is that what you want to work out through me? Just because it's possible doesn't mean that it's something God wants. And so, they go.

Sure enough, the Moabites come down and look across this valley. The sun is shining, and that water is all red. And they say, oh, wow, the Israelites and the Judeans and the Edomites, all kind of tense with each other.

Anyhow, they've fallen out, and they've killed one another. Quick, let's go get the spoil. And they discover, no, the three parties hadn't fallen out, and they're waiting for them.

So, Moab is defeated, and they travel all the way up through the land until they finally reach the capital city. The king of Moab tries desperately to drive them off but fails. As a last resort, he sacrifices his firstborn son on the walls of the city.

And the text says this. The fury against Israel was great. They withdrew and returned to their own land.

Well, as if you get the handout, I point out there's really no agreement among commentators exactly what this is saying. It's so opaque that a number of possibilities exist. One is that the Israelites were so shocked at this terrible thing that they lost their will to fight.

Notice it says they withdrew. It does not say they were defeated. Another suggestion is that it's Yahweh who is angry.

He's angry because Joram's precipitous action has resulted in this atrocity. Another possibility is that the Moabites just went berserk. And the Israelites were so shocked at this that, again, they withdrew.

But the point in all of this is that God's purposes in difficulties, tragedies, is to produce good in the end as he demonstrates his care and his ability.