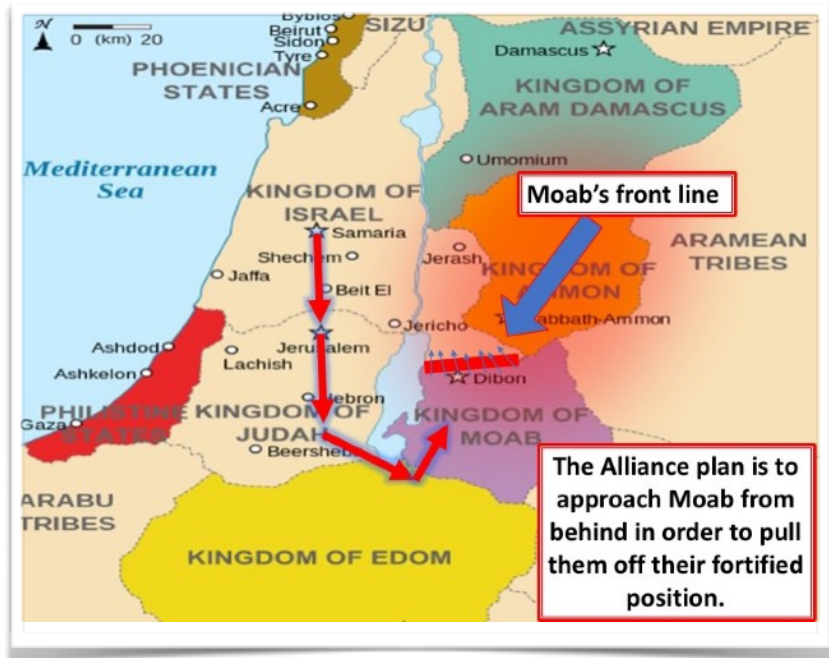


WHEN WE TAKE MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS

Most of us know what it is like when we take matters into our own hands without first seeking guidance from the Lord. We all know how that worked out for Abraham.

One time he left the Promised Land without asking God. He moved to Egypt because of a famine, and out of fear he ended up lying about his wife. He said she was his sister. Then the king of Egypt took Sarah with the intent of marrying her. It took a divine act of God to deliver Sarah and Abraham from the mess he created.



Another time, he attempted to fulfill the promise God made about a son. Instead of waiting on God's timing he took Sarah's servant Hagar to father a child. What a disaster that turned out to be. Sarah was plagued with envy and jealousy. Hagar was cruel to Sarah. The issue compounded itself many times over when Sarah bore Isaac. Ishmael taunted Isaac. Abraham's heart was broken when God told him to send Hagar and Ismael away. Then for centuries a conflict continued between Ishmael's descendants (Edom) and Isaac's descendants (Israel).

This all happened because someone got out of step with God. Problems like this can get really out of control, that is, unless God intercedes. Otherwise, everything will go up in smoke.

Have you ever been there? Are you in one of those death spirals of your own making? It is amazing the messes we can find ourselves — debt, bad relationships, business and family problems. It is possible for things to get so bad that lives can be lost. That is what we find in our lesson this morning. An entire army could be wiped out, and several nations crippled.

In this study, we will find people doing what seemed to be right, but they did so without first seeking God's wisdom on the matter.

1. What was King Jehoram's spiritual state? (2 Kings 3:1-3)

What does it mean when it says, "Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom."

What were the sins of Jeroboam? (see 1 Kings 12:32-33)

ANSWER:

2 Kings 3:2 says that king Jehoram was evil. He was not as bad as His father Ahab, for He removed at least one of the images of Baal his father had made, but he was still bad.

In 1 Kings 12:32-33 we find the sins of Jeroboam.

"And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did **he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made**: and he placed in **Bethel** the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in **Bethel** the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense."

As soon as Jeroboam took office, he faced a political crisis. Many Israelites were heartbroken that the nation was divided, and there were rumblings of reuniting. A reunion could only happen under David's rightful heir, King Rehoboam — and the result would be certain death for King Jeroboam. So naturally, he was opposed to reunion.

Fueling the longings for reunion were the annual pilgrimages; the LORD required every worshipper to attend a festival at Jerusalem, Rehoboam's capital, three times every year. Jerusalem was a splendid place, rich with meaning for all the Israelites. Solomon had built beautiful palaces, and his temple was one of the architectural wonders of the world. Not only that, but King Rehoboam himself would be presiding over the ceremonies. All this was very inviting to Jeroboam's public.

God had promised Jeroboam that his kingdom would be secure. But Jeroboam didn't trust God's promise. He decided the pilgrimages to Jerusalem were too dangerous, and he had to stop them.

To stop the pilgrimages, Jeroboam changed the national religion. He abolished worship of the LORD and in its place built two golden calf idols, modeled no doubt after the one built centuries earlier by the high priest Aaron. He placed the idols strategically — one in the extreme northern city of Dan, very convenient for the northern population; the other in the southern border town of Bethel, so any pilgrim to Jerusalem would have to pass right by it on their journeys.

Jeroboam also fired all the Levitical priests, who were established according to the LORD's instructions, were familiar with the LORD's regulations, and would influence the people against Jeroboam's new religion. He established a priesthood of his own, designed to take their orders from him. Many Levites and others faithful to the LORD emigrated to Judah.

The golden calf cult, and the sexually immoral practices historically associated with their worship, became an ongoing snare to the people of Israel.

Therefore, we find Jehoram's spiritual state was not much better than his father or his brother. As the text states, Jehoram perpetuated the practice of calf-worship which was promoted 72 years earlier by king Jeroboam.

2. What did Jehoram's brother (the previous king of Israel) try to do to Elijah? – 2 Kings 1:2-4, 9-15.

Discuss how Ahaziah's actions against Elijah might effect Elisha's relation to King Jehoram – (2 Kings 3:14).

King Jehoram had a problem. After his father, Ahab died, his brother, Ahaziah, ruled for two years. Ahaziah made poor decisions and allowed the nation to drift. When his brother suddenly died, Jehoram became king and inherited a number of problems.

He and his family disdained the prophets of God. An example of this is found in 2 Kings 1. There we find King Jehoram's brother sending troops to violently take Elijah, but God twice struck the captains of fifty and their fifty as they came to take him.

3. What problem was king Jehoram trying to solve? – 2 Kings 3:4-6

The Problem:

Jehoram's first problem as king was to deal with Moab. They were a vassal nation to Israel. They were supposed to supply Israel with 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with the wool. But Moab fortified their border and rebelled against Israel – 2 Kings 3:4-5.

This created many serious problems for the new king and the nation. First, it made Jehoram and the nation look weak. Second, Moab could become a lethal threat to Israel by joining up with Damascus and attacking Israel's southern border. Third, economically, Moab's rebellion would have negative impact on Israel's textile and agricultural industry. It would be like Taiwan, Thailand or Japan shutting down business with us. The economic impact from this would bring shortages and high prices.

Notice the census taken in 2 Kings 3:6. Apparently, Israel did not feel confident enough to take Moab in a head-on battle. So Jehoram sought to make a league with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

4. What was the battle plan? – 2 Kings 3:7-8. Why does this plan make a lot of sense from a human standpoint?

Jehoram made a league with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who in turn invited their vassal state, Edom to join them – 2 Kings 3:7-8. They determined to either cross the land bridge through the Dead Sea into Moab. Or they would cut through Edom and head north into Moab. This set the stage for Israel and Judah's trouble. Now what is so wrong with this plan. It makes perfect sense. Three armies against one. A surprise move by Israel and Judah

would force Moab away from her defenses drawing the enemy into the open. It made sense for the nation of Judah to work with Israel. It would cement their relationships with the new king of Israel. It could open up new economic ventures. Maybe King Jehoram even sweetened the alliance by giving his sister Athaliah, to Jehoshaphat's son. Therefore, the promise of peace, victory, spoils of war and future trade agreements looked like a win, win scenario for all involved. How can something that looked so good fail?

5. What is wrong with the Alliance's plan? — 2 Kings 3:7-8; 1 Kings 19:2

The Real Drawbacks:

First, they did not ask God. Second, it was wrong for Jehoshaphat to make this type of an agreement with Jehoram. This is not Jehoshaphat's first time around making alliances with Israel. Three years before he made a similar alliance with King Ahab. They united to go against Syria. It ended up badly. Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life and King Ahab was killed. Afterwards, God sent a prophet to sternly rebuke Jehoshaphat for his alliance.

“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” – 1 Chron 19:2.

It defies imagination why Jehoshaphat would ever make another alliance with Israel, BUT he did!!! Maybe this time it will be different. Isn't that what we think. So Jehoshaphat thought this time it would be different, but it wasn't.

6. Discuss the disaster that followed — 2 Kings 3:9-10. Why did Jehoram blame the Lord for their predicament?

2 Kings 3:9 – The armies entered Moab and soon found themselves without water. They were on the verge of death. If Moab had attacked at that time it might have been possible for them to defeat the three kings. In 2 Kings 3:10 – Jehoram blames the Lord for their predicament.

7. Discuss God's deliverance — 2 Kings 3:11-18, 20-27.

2 Kings 3:11-12 — Jehoshaphat wisely calls for a prophet.

2 Kings 3:13 – Elisha rebukes the king of Israel — Jehoram. Remember, there was no love lost between them. One year earlier Jehoram's brother tried to kill Elisha's master, Elijah.

2 Kings 3:14 – Elisha stays because of Jehoshaphat, is a believer, however he is a wayward one at this point. In 2 Kings 3:16-17, Elisha tells them to dig ditches and in 2 Kings 3:18, Elisha says the water is a light thing for the Lord to do. Furthermore, the Lord will deliver Moab into their hand.

2 Kings 3:19 – They were to cut down the trees and stop up wells and mar the land. This would weaken Moab for years. 2 Kings 3:20-27 – It happened as Elisha predicted.

7. Discuss the following insights:

First, Jehoshaphat should have known better. How does this relate to us?

It nearly cost him his life. Think of all the things we do without asking God. Changing jobs, getting married, buying a house, and so many other things. Humanly speaking, our moves may seem good. The potential benefits may appear off the charts. We reason that God in no way would say no to our brilliant plan, or suggest another way.

What should we do? ... Seek God first.

Second, what was Elisha doing in Moab? What can we learn from this?

Elisha was a prophet to Israel. But in this passage, we find him 100 miles away from home. Here we get an insight to the sovereignty of God. God is all knowing. He knew the foolish plans of Judah and was moving on the basis of His covenant. Fortunately for Israel, it was not time for that nation to fall. Israel will go another 132 years before God will have enough of her apostate conduct. In this we find God's mercy. There were many people in Israel that still needed to hear the message of life. God is always near. He knows our plans and is always ahead of us.

Third: What would have happened if Jehoshaphat had not called for a prophet? How can this be applied to us?

Elisha did not march into the camp and say to the kings, "I am here." He waited quietly outside of the camp. I wonder what would have happened if they had not called for a prophet. Here we find God always nearby; waiting for us to call on Him. He does not interfere until we invite Him. Perhaps the situation would have been much worse if they had not called for a prophet.

Fourth, God delivered them from a disaster, but He called the kings to step out on faith first. Does this act relate to what God may do in our lives?

"Make this valley full of ditches" – 2 Kings 3:16. Do you know how hard it is to dig trenches in the hot arid lands of Moab? It is filled with rocks. The troops were already suffer from thirst. This was not just a few holes. God said, make "this valley full of ditches." God often asks us to step out on faith before there are any results. He may be calling you to do something that is very difficult. He promises you that it will get you out of your predicament, but from your stand point it will take a miracle.

Fifth, God is revealing Himself to a wayward people. What can we learn from this?

He cares for them. He is not finished. He desires them to turn to Him. By Elisha being outside the camp, He shows the nations that He is ever present and all-knowing. He uses Elisha to demonstrate that He is always near. God knew what would happen ahead of time and sent Elisha to Moab. He shows His power by bringing water without wind or rain. He shows that He never changes when Elisha rebuked the king of Israel for chasing after the false gods of his father and mother. And God showed His mercy based on the covenant made with Abraham.