

“Looking to God’s Word”
2 Kings 3:1-14
(Preached at Trinity, December 5, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After the author concludes the ascension of Elijah and Elisha succeeding him as God’s prophet we are returned to the political situation in the Northern and Southern kingdoms. In the final chapter of **1 Kings** we read of the death of Ahab. During a battle with the Arameans Ahab received a mortal wound.
1 Kings 22:35 NAU - "The battle raged that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot in front of the Arameans, and died at evening, and the blood from the wound ran into the bottom of the chariot."
1 Kings 22:40 NAU - "So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son became king in his place."
2. We are also briefly told of the rise of Jehoshaphat in the Southern Kingdom. We are told he walked rightly before God.
1 Kings 22:41-43 NAU - "Now Jehoshaphat the son of Asa became king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. ⁴² Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. ⁴³ He walked in all the way of Asa his father; he did not turn aside from it, doing right in the sight of the LORD."
3. **1 Kings** ended with Ahab’s son Ahaziah succeeding his father to the throne. We are immediately told it was a case of “like father, like son.” And he also inherited the wickedness of his mother, Jezebel.
1 Kings 22:52 NAU - "He did evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin."
4. As we began **2 Kings** we are first reminded of the instability of the kingdom left behind by Ahab. "Now Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab." We are also told of the untimely death of Ahaziah – or in this case, his timely death. He is succeeded by his brother, Jehoram.
5. After we are told of the rise of Elisha as God’s prophet in **Chapter 2**, we now return to the political intrigue. Jehoram, Ahab’s other son, succeeds Ahaziah to the throne and he continues the family tradition of evil. To his credit, he put away the sacred pillar of Baal, but his 12 year reign can be summed up in **Verse 2**: “He did evil in the sight of the LORD.” Nothing else really mattered.
But the author is pleased to give us an account of his ineptitude as king and leader.

Alfred Edersheim wrote of Jehoram: “A more contemptible sovereign never ruled over Israel. Braggart and rash before danger arose, but cowardly and desponding at the first appearance of serious difficulty, he was always oscillating between boastfulness and utter despondency.”¹

6. It gets a little confusing here because there are two Jehorams. One is the son of Ahab and the other is the son of Jehoshaphat. And apparently, Jehoshaphat and his son, Jehoram served together for five years – an overlap of the reign of the King of Judah. This means that Ahab’s son, Jehoram in the Northern kingdom became king in the second year of Jehoram, Jehoshaphat’s son, which was also the 18th year of Jehoshaphat. The Jehoram we are looking at is the king of the Northern Kingdom – Ahab’s son.
7. The author returns to the rebellion of the Moabites and Jehoram’s response. Jehoram determines to bring Moab back under submission to Israel. He sends word to Jehoshaphat to join him in the battle. They are joined by the king of Edom. It would be expected that Jehoram had a plan, but we read he was clueless:
Verse 8 – “Which way shall we go up?”
8. They head off to war with Moab without any intelligence regarding the Moabite army. In addition, they failed to bring adequate provisions. Within seven days they had run out of water. Perhaps they planned on finding water along the way, but there was none, and it had reached the point of desperation. Inept leadership and poor planning was about to lead to defeat for Israel.
2 Kings 3:10 NAU - "Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab."
9. The first reaction of the king of Israel was despair – We will be consumed by the Moabites. The first reaction of the king of Judah was, we must seek our all- powerful God. Jehoshaphat’s heart was right - "Is there not a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?"
When faced with a difficult situation Jehoshaphat turned to the Word of God. Sadly, we don’t find him seeking God before going to war.
10. They are told that Elisha was there. We aren’t told why Elisha was traveling with the troops.
 - a. We are told that he had a reputation as Elijah’s successor. Elijah was given the title of “the chariot of Israel and its horsemen” (2:12). In other words, he was the protector and defender of Israel.
Elisha was his successor.
 - b. We are also told that Jehoshaphat knew who Elisha was. He was God’s prophet sent with a Word from God.
2 Kings 3:12 NAU - "Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him."
11. Jehoshaphat knew the Word of the Lord was with the prophet of God. This was at the heart of the prophetic ministry. They were the channels through whom the Word of God was transmitted. This was an important theme running through 1 & 2 Kings. The phrase, “Word of the LORD” is found 33 times in 1 Kings and an additional 16 times in 2 Kings. Jehoshaphat knew he needed to hear a word from God.

¹ Cyril J. Barber, *The Books of Kings: The Righteousness of God Illustrated in the Lives of the People of Israel and Judah*, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 59.

12. The three kings immediately went down to see the prophet. He received Jehoshaphat kindly. The king of Israel, however, was sternly rebuffed.
2 Kings 3:13-14 NAU - "Now Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings *together* to give them into the hand of Moab." ¹⁴ Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you." In other words, Elisha tells him, why are you coming to me. Go seek the prophets of your father and mother.
13. Elisha is telling Jehoram that if not for Jehoshaphat he wouldn't be paying any attention to him at all. He was beyond the point of repentance.
- a. Jehoram was forced to look to God but unable to trust Him. He could only see God's holy wrath. Although it would be over a hundred years before God's final judgment would come upon Israel we can see they have already been given over to their corruption.
 - b. John Bunyan spoke of the man in the iron cage – a man left in his sin. "I sinned against the light of the word, and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me: I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent."²
14. As a symbol of God's fiery indignation Elisha calls forth some soothing music before he could even stand before the wickedness of Jehoram. Elisha announces God's mercies on behalf of Jehoshaphat.
1. A rainless flood of water.
 2. The defeat of Moab.
- I. Most people only want to hear from God during a time of need.
- A. Jesus attracted multitudes when He was meeting their needs
 1. The Gospels record Jesus feeding over 5000 people
John 6:10 NAU - "So the men sat down, in number about five thousand."
Matthew 14:21 NAU - "There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children."
 - a. Including the woman and children there were most likely over 10,000 people present
 - b. Almost all of this great multitude would leave in unbelief.
 2. Multitudes came to be healed but on the day of the crucifixion they spoke with one voice: **John 19:15 NAU** - "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!"
 - B. Most people come to God seeking direction with no intention of following.
 1. A terminal illness makes people try anything, even God
 2. A sick child, a lost job, a disaster – fire, flood, hurricane. People will often turn to God. But not because of who He is but for what He can give.

² Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Publishing), page 27.

- C. We shouldn't miss that as they sought the Word of God the answer was not without their obedience.
1. They were commanded to dig trenches.
 2. They were hot and parched. Their thirst must have been intense, and yet they were told to exert physical labor.
 3. They were told to obey even if they didn't comprehend the meaning. With no rain it wasn't likely water would begin flowing in the trenches.
 4. God demands that we obey His Word absolutely.
- II. Some go to great ends in seeking God's pleasure through their own wisdom and imagination.
- A. We have a difficult account at the end of the chapter
1. Moab is in a desperate condition.
 2. They first stood valiantly thinking Israel was defeated – **Verses 21-24** Instead, they were horribly defeated.
 3. Next the king of the Moabites mustered 700 of his most valiant men and charged. Again, they were defeated.
2 Kings 3:26 NAU - "When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not."
 4. Like most, the king of Moab was religious. He was like Jehoram. He looked to many gods and hoped all would lend their aid. Jehoram served the gods of Ahab and Jezebel but also knew the power of Yahweh.
 5. Driven to desperation their king did the unthinkable. He sacrificed his first born son and heir to the throne.
2 Kings 3:27 NAU - "Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall."
- B. Men will go to great ends to seek the aid of God. Modern many may not be as openly polytheistic. Instead, they reinvent God to suit their needs.
1. Paul described modern man well.
2 Timothy 4:3-4 NAU - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
 2. The modern man is no less superstitious than the king of Moab. Seeing his desperate situation the Moabite king resorted to human sacrifice, not because he had received some divine revelation. It just seemed like a good idea.
 3. There are endless ways the modern church seeks success and gain God's good pleasure. In resorting to their own human devices they seek the very things God forbids.

Our Confession speaks to it: Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

“But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself,² and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”

3. People make man pledges of commitment during the heat of the adversity, only to forget when times improve.

C. It would appear the human sacrifice was successful.

2 Kings 3:27 NAU - "And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land."

1. What was the source of wrath that came upon Israel? There are several views.
 - a. Some say it was the wrath of the pagan god of the Moabites. Of course this is false. There are no other gods. We saw that the prophets of Baal cut themselves in futility trying to invoke their god.
 - b. Some say it was the wrath of God upon Israel for provoking such desperation from the Moabites. Some have even asserted it was God’s judgment for Israel’s abuse of the environment. While this language most often refers to God’s wrath, this is not likely the case here.
2. The word for “wrath” can also mean indignation. The word for “against” (עַל) can also be translated “upon” The wrath is referring to the great indignation that came upon Israel over witnessing this deplorable act. Even in their corrupted condition, Israel was disgusted by what they saw. Our hearts should be stirred over the vain sinful acts that surround us today.

2 Peter 2:7-8 NAU - "He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds),"
3. Dale Ralph Davis writes: “It’s as if Yahweh says: ‘See where pagans go in their desperation? See where paganism leads? Do you savvy at all the matchless gift you have in a God who lives and hears and speaks and delivers without bribery?’ It’s as if the writer is pleading: ‘O Israel, do you realize the treasure that you have in Yahweh? You never need to resort to stuff like this.’ In Moab you can bash your head against the wall or sacrifice your son on it. Both are equally futile. But to Israel Yahweh has given prophets through whom one can receive the light and help one needs. Here is the easy yoke of the word of God. What a relief biblical religion is! If you don’t believe it, try paganism.”³

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 50.

Conclusion:

1. Our God is holy and must be approached as holy. His Word is holy. We must not pretend to seek God through His Word if we don't have any intention of being conformed to it.
2. We must seek God in His Word and obey His every Word.

James 1:21-25 NAU - "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."