

Lesson Seven
The Life and Times of Elijah and Elisha
2 Kings 3-4

1. The War Against Moab. 3:1-27.

1. Elisha's role in the war against Moab demonstrates that his word is as powerful and his prophecy is as effective as Elijah's. 1 Kings 22.

1. The history of Jehoram is continued from 1:17-18 with the usual introductory formulae (vv. 1-3).

2. As Elijah appeared abruptly to Ahab with the announcement of the drought, so Elisha appeared abruptly in this narrative upon inquiry from the kings. v. 11.

3. Information about Masha.

1. All of the Biblical information about Masha is contained in 2 Kings 3.

2. Mesha's description of his rebellion is preserved on the Moabite Stone, an inscription in which he names the places he captured and fortified during the reign of Omri's "son" after forty years of Israelite subjugation.

1. Not surprisingly, Mesha's inscription does not mention his reverses at the hands of Jehoram of Israel and his allies.

2. The date of the rebellion is uncertain.

3. If it began forty years after the Israelite King Omri (*ca.* 884-873 B.C.) subjugated Moabite territory, it would have occurred in the reign of Omri's grandson Ahaziah (*ca.* 853-852) or great grandson Jehoram (*ca.* 852-841).

4. Understanding "his son" to mean "his grandson" or "his descendant" is in complete accord with Semitic usage.

5. It was evidently interpreted in this way by Josephus who placed Mesha's uprising in the second year of Ahaziah. *Ant.* ix 2.1.

2. Moab Revolts. 3:1-12.

1. Jehoram's evil is not like that of his father (Ahab) and mother (Jezebel) who lived throughout his reign. vv. 1-3.

1. The pillar of Baal was a standing stele, probably a particular example similar to the inscription and relief on Baal images found near altars at Hazor, Zinjirli and in Syria.

2. One such stone remained in the temple (2 Kings 10:26-27), perhaps reinstated by Jezebel acting as an unhelpful mother (1 Kings 16:32-33).

2. Masha rebelled against his subordinate role as vassal in which he would need his skill as a "sheep-breeder" to supply the uncounted mass (a hundred thousand) yearling lambs and rams annually or "regularly." vv. 4-7.
 1. His rebellion after Ahab's death united Israel and Judah against him.
 2. Joram reactivates the treaty with Judah made between equals (a parity treaty) which is accepted by Jehoshaphat (as in 1 Kings 22:4) with the added assurance that he would march with him.
3. The plan was to avoid the route through Ammon and thus the newly fortified and rebuilt strongholds of Moab by attacking Moab in the rear. vv. 8-9.
 1. This required access through Judah and Edom whose king was Jehoshaphat's vassal.
 2. They chose the way through the Desert of Edom by way of the desert from Arad and round the south end of the Dead Sea by the road from Zoar Horonaim to the capital Kir-Hareseth (Isa. 15:5; Jer 48:5).
 3. After 853 BC Masha seems to have taken the opportunity to rebel when he thought Israel was preoccupied with Assyria.
4. The kings and the prophets. vv. 10-12.
 1. Joram (Jehoram) may well have consulted his own prophets, but under stress their different characters are disclosed (and so it is with us as well).
 2. Jehoram despairs while Jehoshaphat looks to God.
 3. The lessons at Ramoth-Gilead were remembered (1 Kings 22:7-20) and Jehoshaphat demanded assurance from his God.
 4. Some think that Elisha was acting on behalf of Elijah who had previously written to Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:12-15), and Elisha is here portrayed as Elijah's servant.
 5. This time the kings go to the prophet rather than summon the prophet to them. 1 Kings 22:9.
 6. Jehoshaphat supports Elisha as the true prophet, the one who fearlessly speaks God's word. v. 12.
3. Victory over Moab and Abundant Water Promised. 3:13-19.
 1. Elisha is antagonistic toward the King of Israel, but he speaks because of the King of Judah.
 2. The prophecy of verses 17-19 required the recipients' hard work to make it effective and unseen powers to bring it about in a miracle of provision.

3. The dried up river bed was to have many trenches dug to contain the water that God would provide.
4. Would anyone dare say that the armies of Israel and Judah had "earned" the victory that God would provide?
4. The Defeat of Moab. 3:20-27.
 1. The water came as God had promised.
 2. The Moabites, gathered for the battle, saw the morning sun glistening on the water so that it appeared as blood.
 3. Concluding that the alliance had fallen apart and devoured itself, the Moabites rushed for what they thought was spoil, but which turned out to be their destruction.
 4. The Hebrew allies effected a total destruction (v. 25, *cf.* v. 19) until stopped at the southerly capital of Moab, Kir Hareseth or Kir Moab (Isa. 15:1).
 5. The human sacrifice of the crown prince publicly on the wall of the capital was used to appease the national god Chemosh and had showed his displeasure in Moab's calamitous defeat.
 6. The sacrifice raised great wrath against the alliance and, either because of the wrath or because of the horror and dismay with which the alliance perceived the sacrifice, the alliance withdrew.
2. Stories about Elisha. 2 Kings 4:1-44.
 1. Continuing the Elijah group of episodes, these events now recount similar miraculous happenings associated with Elisha.
 1. While they show that Elisha was a worthy successor who could act in a similarly effective way as his master, the main purpose is to show his, and thus God's, support for those who fear the Lord.
 2. They also serve to indicate the everyday life of the times.
 2. The Widow's Oil. vv. 1-7.
 1. This shows the prophet's moral concern for a serious social problem.
 1. The enslavement of defaulting debtors or their families was common throughout the ancient Near East (*cf.* 1 Kings 2:39-40; Lev. 25:39; Isa. 50:1; Neh. 5:5; Law of Hammurapi § § 117,119,213).
 2. To avoid misuse the Hebrew law set a time limit (Ex. 21:2-3, 7).
 2. The Targum names the dead prophet Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4) who, according to Josephus (*Ant.*, ix.4.2), had borrowed money to feed the young prophets.
 3. The "pot" of oil is a unique word, possibly for a small anointing flask.

(Relief often begins with the little we have at hand. Ex. 4:2.)

4. Elisha elicits faith and action by questions, encouragement ("not a few") and word.
 1. The quantity of oil was only limited by the woman's faith if she failed to ask for enough empty jars.
 2. She "poured out" - kept pouring out.
 3. The oil lasted until the jars were full.
5. Elisha's instruction was to pay her debt, to redeem her sons who were taken as pledges.
 1. God's giving is often abundant. Mk. 6:43; Eph. 3:30.
 2. God does not fail as the God of the widow and the fatherless. Deut. 10:18; Jas. 1:27.
3. The Shunammite's Son. vv. 8-37.
 1. The Shunammite woman.
 1. She was a "great" woman -- probably well-to-do. v. 8.
 2. She was a spiritual woman -- she recognized Elisha as a man of God. v. 9.
 3. She was a thoughtful woman -- she prepared a place for Elisha. v. 10.
 4. She was a content woman -- when Elisha sought to repay her hospitality refused his offer. vv. 11-13.
 2. The prophet's reciprocity -- a son. vv. 14-17.
 1. The son is stricken. vv. 18-20.
 1. Many conclude that the child suffered sun stroke, but this would be unusual, even among the children of Esdraelon at harvest time.
 2. Cerebral malaria has been suggested, because meningitis seldom kills so quickly.
 3. It is best not to speculate upon what is not revealed.
 2. The mother's reaction. vv. 21-28.
 1. She lost her child but not her faith.
 1. Her first thought was of God and His prophet.
 2. When inquiry was made as to her state she said, "It is well."
 2. She fell at the feet of the man of God and placed her predicament in his hands.
 3. The prophet's reaction. vv. 29-37.
 1. He sent Gehazi ahead and he and the Shunammite woman followed.
 2. Gehazi met them on their arrival and announced his failure -- there

was no sound or response, no sign of life; the boy was dead. vv. 29-31.

3. Elisha restored life to the young man. vv. 32- 38.

1. This was no artificial respiration.
2. Gehazi was a witness both to the child's being dead as well as to his revival which became widely known (2 Kings 8:5).
3. Elisha's faith is shown by his prayer.

4. Death in the Pot. 4:38-41.

1. This event shows the power of God to make the harmful innocuous as well as His care and provision for his own.
2. The prophets were sitting before Elisha -- school was in session.
3. The phrase "sons of the prophets" occurs first in 1 Kings 20:35.
 1. It signifies the schools or colleges of Prophets that existed in several of the Israelite, and probably of the Jewish, towns, where young men were regularly educated for the prophetic office.
 2. These "schools" make their first appearance under Samuel (1 Sam. 19:20).
 3. There is no distinct evidence that they continued later than the time of Elisha; but it is on the whole most probable that the institution survived the Captivity, and that the bulk of the "Prophets," whose works have come down to us, belonged to them.
 4. Amos (7:14-15) seems to speak as if his were an exceptional case.
4. Ignorance is no excuse of the law -- the wild gourds were poison in spite of good intentions.
5. Throw in the "meal" of God's word - there will be no death in the pot.

5. Feeding a Multitude. 4:42-44.

1. This event continues to show God's care for his own.
 1. The bringing of the first fruits to Elisha was a recognition of him as Jehovah's representative.
 2. As a miracle it may be compared with Jesus feeding the multitude. Mt. 14:13-21.
 3. Gehazi was skeptical of the provision, as were Jesus disciples (Mt. 14:17; 15:34-39), possibly because they were brought in by one man in a small sack.
2. Place our lives in the hand of God and wondrous things will happen.