

Old Testament History

The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 4

Background:

Introduction:

Jehoram, also called Joram, (852-841 BC) was the son of Ahab and Jezebel.¹ Because his brother Ahaziah had died prematurely from a fall and left no sons, Jehoram succeeded his brother to the throne of Israel and reigned twelve years (2 Kings 3:1). His reign was largely contemporary with Jehoram (or Joram) the king of Judah. The first official act of the new king was to bring the Moabites back into subjection to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Mesha, king of Moab, had been paying a yearly tribute to King Ahab amounting to 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. However, following the death of Ahab and the untimely death of Ahaziah, Mesha saw this as an opportunity to revolt and regain independence (2 Kings 3:4). The biblical account agrees with what is recorded on the Moabite Stone (See: Historical Notes, page 2), that the revolt took place after many years of oppression going back as far as Omri and his sons, or rather his son and grandson. Since Jehoram felt he would not be able to win a decisive victory with just his armies, he enlisted the help of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, as well as Edom (Edomites) who had been previously subdued by Judah (See map on page 9). When Jehoram's armies suffered from a severe lack of water in his conquest of the Moabites, Jehoram thought it was God who was deliberately delivering them into the hands of their enemies (2 Kings 3:13). Fortunately, the allied armies miraculously escaped perishing from thirst on their long march into Moab around the southern end of the Dead Sea. However, this event left Jehoram with a completely erroneous concept of the God of Israel, thinking of Him as a malevolent, angry deity.

After making some gains in their conquest of the Moabites, the coalition armies besieged the city of Kir-hareseth. In desperation, King Mesha offered up his eldest son as a burnt offering on the city wall in sight of the armies of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, who were so affected that they gave up the siege and withdrew.

Although Jehoram made a partial break from the idolatrous practices of his parents (2 Kings 3:2), he continued in the way of Jeroboam and made no effort to eradicate the worship of Baal from among the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. He did not destroy the idols of Baal, but merely removed them. Jehoram left that task to his successor Jehu (841-814 BC) (2 Kings 10:26).

¹ Jehoram the king of Israel is often confused with his brother-in-law by the same name. Jehoram the king of Judah was the son of Jehoshaphat. He is related to Jehoram king of Israel by having married Ahab and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah, which marked the beginning of his downfall.

The prophet Elisha began his own work early in the reign of Jehoram of Israel, performing about twice as many miracles as did Elijah. Although he refused to serve Jehoram (v. 13), at the request of Jehoshaphat, Elisha agreed to accompany the armed forces that were going up against Moab.

Following the conflict with Moab, we read of several miracles which the prophet of God performed, giving proof that he was truly a representative of the One True God. Elisha was first approached by a woman "of the wives of the sons of the prophets" who cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves" (2 Kings 4:1). Since she had nothing with which to repay her debt, Elisha miraculously helped her by allowing her one jar of oil to fill all the empty jars she was able to borrow from her neighbors. When the oil was sold it was enough to pay the debt and provide for her and her sons.

On another occasion, Elisha sought to repay the kindness and hospitality of a wealthy woman of Shunem (near Jezreel). He had apparently been the guest of this woman and her husband on his frequent journeys through the region. When Elisha sought to repay her she refused. That's when the prophet learned that she was childless, and since her husband was old, she was facing the prospect of soon becoming a poor widow. Elisha promised she would be blessed with a son within the year. As promised, the child was born to the Shunammite woman. However, sometime later, when her son became sick and died, she once again turned to Elisha for help, and he miraculously revived her son.

In another example of God blessing and empowering Elisha with miraculous gifts, we read where the prophet returned to visit the community of the prophets at Gilgal. Unfortunately, he arrived during the time of a severe famine. Despite the shortage of food, Elisha instructed the servants to prepare a large bowl of stew. However when poisonous herbs had accidentally been gathered and added to the stew, Elisha miraculously purified the stew by adding some flour, and the people were able to eat it without any harm.

In another miracle, a man from Baal-shalisha brought Elisha the first fruits of his harvest. The offerings of first fruits were always consecrated to God, but were also given to the priests to help sustain them as the servants of Jehovah. In doing this gracious act, the man acknowledged that Elisha was a true representative of the God of heaven. When Elisha asked that the loaves be distributed to the people (presumably the prophets and sons of the prophets), the man replied there would not be enough to satisfy the demand. However, the people not only ate their fill, but soon discovered there was actually a surplus.

Historical Notes:

The Bible says Mesha, king of Moab, who had been paying tribute to Israel suddenly stopped, prompting the war against the Moabites (2 Kings 3:5). The account of that event is not just recorded in the Bible, it was also recorded by Mesha himself in what is known today as The Mesha Stele – more popularly known as The Moabite Stone.

The Moabite Stone is a *stèle* (inscribed stone) set up around 840 BC by King Mesha of Moab (a kingdom located in modern Jordan). Mesha tells how Kemosh, the God of Moab, had been angry with his people and had allowed them to be subjugated to Israel. However, eventually Kemosh allegedly returned his favors and assisted Mesha to throw off the yoke of Israel and restore the lands of Moab to their people. Mesha then describes his many building projects on the stèle.



The stone was discovered intact by Frederick Augustus Klein, an Anglican missionary, at the site of ancient Dibon (now Dhiban, Jordan), in August 1868. Klein had heard about the stone and was finally led to its location by a local Bedouin. It was a bluish basalt stone, about 4 feet high and 2 feet wide, and 14 inches thick, with an inscription from Mesha, king of Moab. When word of the stone's discovery reached the Berlin Museum, officials negotiated for its recovery. However, not to be outdone, the French Consulate at Jerusalem also made a bid for the stone by offering more money than the Germans.

Local Bedouin's, realizing all that was at stake and unable to agree who actually owned the stone, laboriously hoisted the stone out of the earth and built a large fire around it. After heating the stone, they poured cold water on it, fracturing the stone, allowing them to chip away several large pieces which they divided among themselves. A "squeeze" (a papier-mâché impression) had been obtained by a local Arab on behalf of noted French archeologist Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau, and fragments containing most of the inscription (669 letters out of about 1,100) were later recovered and pieced together to preserve the inscription. The squeeze and the reassembled stèle are now in the Louvre Museum.

The Moabite Stone is the longest Iron Age inscription ever found in the region, and provides major evidence for the Moabite language. The stèle, whose story closely parallels, with some differences, the biblical account of 2nd Kings (2 Kings 3:4-8), provides invaluable information on the Moabite language and the political relationship between Moab and Israel at one moment in the 9th century BC. More importantly, it is the most extensive inscription ever recovered that refers to the kingdom of Israel (the "House of Omri"), and it bears the earliest extra-biblical reference to the Israelite God Yahweh, and – if French scholar André Lemaire's reconstruction of a portion of line 31 is correct – the earliest mention of the "House of David" (i.e., the kingdom of Judah). Although the authenticity of the Moabite Stone has been disputed over the years, and although some biblical skeptics suggest the text of the stone is not a historical record but merely a biblical allegory, the Moabite Stone is regarded as genuine and historically

accurate by the vast majority of biblical archaeologists today. It now resides in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

In an article published in the December 18, 1995 edition of *Time Magazine*, the author wrote:

"The skeptics' claim that King David never existed is now hard to defend. Last year the French scholar Andre Lemaire reported a related "House of David" discovery in *Biblical Archaeology Review*. His subject was the Mesha Stele (also known as the Moabite Stone), the most extensive inscription ever recovered from ancient Palestine. Found in 1868 at the ruins of biblical Dibon and later fractured, the basalt stone wound up in the Louvre, where Lemaire spent seven years studying it. His conclusion: the phrase "House of David" appears there as well. As with the Tel Dan fragment, this inscription comes from an enemy of Israel boasting of a victory – King Mesha of Moab, who figured in the Bible. Lemaire had to reconstruct a missing letter to decode the wording, but if he's right, there are now two 9th century references to David's dynasty." (*Time Magazine*, December 18, 1995, Volume 146, No. 25)

Outline:

- I. **The Reign of Jehoram in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judah (2 Kings 3:1-27)**
 - A. Jehoram becomes king (2 Kings 3:1-3)
 - B. Moab rebels against Israel (2 Kings 3:4)
 - C. Jehoram's alliance with Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:5-27)
- II. **The Beginning of Elisha's Prophetic Ministry (2 Kings 4:1-44)**
 - A. Elisha and the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7)
 - B. Elisha raises the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:8-37)
 - C. Elisha purifies the pot of stew (2 Kings 4:38-41)
 - D. Elisha feeds one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42-44)

Link to Online Bible Study Tools:

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The Exposition:

- I. **The Reign of Jehoram in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judah (2 Kings 3:1-27)**
 - A. **Jehoram becomes king (2 Kings 3:1-3)**
 1. Who were Jehoram's parents, and who was his brother?

2. Describe his religious policies.
3. For what good thing will he be remembered?

B. Moab rebels against Israel (2 Kings 3:4)

1. Who rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab?
2. Why did this rebellion occur?

C. Jehoram's alliance with Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:5-27)

1. What alliance did Jehoram make with Jehoshaphat, what was the purpose of this alliance, and who else joined this alliance?
2. What problem confronted the armies of these three kings?
3. What question did Jehoshaphat ask?
4. Why was Elisha willing to confer with the kings?

5. What instructions did Elisha give?

6. What did he prophesy concerning the battle?

7. How were the Moabites deceived in the early morning? Describe the battle.

8. What abomination did the king of Moab commit, and why did he do this?

9. What impact did this event have?

II. The Beginning of Elisha's Prophetic Ministry (2 Kings 4:1-44)

A. Elisha and the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7)

1. What problem confronted the widow of one of the sons of the prophets?

2. What did Elisha instruct her to do?

3. What was the outcome?

B. Elisha raises the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:8-37)

1. What did the woman of Shunem do for Elisha?
2. How did Elisha repay her and her husband?
3. What happened to their son?
4. What did the woman do?
5. What did Elisha instruct his servant Gehazi to do?
6. How did Elisha restore life to the child? Compare this incident with Elijah's restoration of life to the son of the widow of Zarephath. (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24)

C. Elisha purifies the pot of stew (2 Kings 4:38-41)

1. What miracle did Elisha perform at Gilgal?

2. What happened, and how did Elisha solve the problem?

D. Elisha feeds one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42-44)

1. Describe how Elisha miraculously fed one hundred people.

2. What concern did the man from Baal Shalisha express?

3. Compare this miracle with the feeding of the multitudes by Jesus. (Matthew 14:31-21; 15:32-38; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-9; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14)

Application:

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?

The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel and Surrounding Kingdoms

