

DIGGING DITCHES

BIBLE TEXT: II Kings 2:19-25; 3:1-27

LESSON 309 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

2 Kings 2:19-25

¹⁹ And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is* pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water *is* naught, and the ground barren.

²⁰ And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought *it* to him.

²¹ And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren *land*.

²² So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

²³ And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

²⁴ And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

²⁵ And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

2 Kings 3:1-27

¹ Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.

² And he wrought evil in the sight

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

God's Power on Elisha

The power of God had come upon Elisha after Elijah had gone into Heaven. Now there was work for him to do. When God gives His people power for service, He expects them to work for Him. He wants them to use what He has given them so that His name will be glorified. If they do not, they will lose that power.

The work that Elisha had to do was to help others. God has left His people in this world to help those in need and to show them how to be saved. Jesus showed us by example how we must live. He lived His life helping others.

The Water Healed

In Jericho, where Elisha was staying, the water supply had become polluted. Man cannot live without water, so the city was in a desperate circumstance. Here was Elisha's opportunity to be helpful, and the men of the city seemed to realize that he could help. They came and told him that Jericho was a beautiful city in which to live, but what could they do without water?

Elisha called for a pot of salt. What could he do with salt? People die if they drink too much salt water. Salt water will ruin the ground so that crops cannot grow. Did Elisha know what he was doing? Would he make the water even worse than it was? The men of Jericho could have said: "Elisha does not have as much wisdom as we thought he had. Surely salt will not help us." They did not question Elisha, but brought him the salt as he asked. Elisha put the salt into the spring from which the water supply came; and the water became fit to use. From that time on, the land prospered with an abundant supply of fresh water.

Under ordinary circumstances, no amount of salt in the water would have purified it. God had worked through Elisha, when the people obeyed Elisha's command. God is looking for obedience in the hearts of His people. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19).

Respect for Elders

Elisha had made the people of Jericho happy, and they did not need him any more, so he left to go to Bethel. On his way he was met by a group of children who made fun of him because he was bald-headed. That was a very disrespectful thing to do. Even if they did not know that he was a man of God, they still should have respected him as an older person. We read in the Bible, "Rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Leviticus 19:32). Peter tells us, "Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Peter 3:8). Jesus is pleased with us when we have respect for the wishes of others and treat them as we would like to be treated.

Elisha asked God to punish these ill-mannered children. And out of the woods came two bears which destroyed 42 of them. This was not just a lesson to teach children to respect older people. It also shows that judgment will come upon all who dishonour the people of God. We may never see any bears come out of the woods to destroy those who ridicule the Christians, but final

of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made.

³ Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

⁴ And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool.

⁵ But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

⁶ And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel.

⁷ And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I *am* as thou *art*, my people as thy people, *and* my horses as thy horses.

⁸ And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom.

⁹ So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

¹⁰ And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

¹¹ But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and

judgment will be just as severe if they do not repent.

Jehoram's Plans for Conquest

Israel was now being ruled by King Jehoram, the son of the wicked King Ahab. He was not as wicked as his father had been, but neither was he a good king. He had destroyed the idols of Baal but had not taken away the golden calves which Israel worshiped. Elisha would have been glad to help him clean up the land and turn all Israel back to worshiping the true God, but Jehoram did not ask him.

The king of Moab had been paying tribute to the king of Israel; and now that there was a change in government, he thought he saw an opportunity to break away from that bondage. Jehoram, however, was not going to let all those riches slip from him, so he decided to go to battle in an effort to keep Moab in bondage. Because the armies of Israel were not strong enough to fight alone, Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to come to help him.

Jehoshaphat's Compromise

Jehoshaphat was a good king; and even though his people were related to the people of Israel, he had no right to compromise with the sinful king of Israel. But he did. He said to Jehoram: "I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Jehoshaphat was going into partnership with a sinner, and God would not bless him.

It was decided to go through the wilderness of Edom on their way to Moab so that they could get the help of Edom's king. How strong they thought they were as the three kings led their armies toward Moab! Could anything stop such a mighty force? God could.

No Water

After seven days of marching, those great armies came to a place where there was no water. Neither man nor beast can live long without water. Now what would happen to those proud kings and their many men? Would they die of thirst, along with their cattle? How helpless is man without God's help!

The king of Israel cried out: "Alas! That the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" But God had not called those kings together. It had all been their own doing. God does not call his people to unite with sinners. Jehoram had planned this whole campaign himself without asking God's advice, or even talking with Elisha. Now that he was in trouble, he blamed God. How often it happens that a person insists on having his own way, and then when he get into difficulties he wants to blame someone else -- even God!

The Prophet Recognized

Jehoshaphat had strayed from the right path, but he knew where to turn when he was in trouble. He called for a Prophet of the true God; and when someone told him about Elisha, he said, "The word of the LORD is with him." He recognized the true Prophet in Israel and was willing to listen to his advice. However, when Elisha was called, he said to Jehoram, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." Jehoram had worshiped idols when all was going well, and had completely ignored the true God. Let those idols help him now, if they could. Why did he wait until he was in trouble to turn to God?

We are thankful that God is merciful and will hear prayers from even such people if they come in repentance. But much better it is to become a friend of God before trouble comes, so that when we suddenly need His help we can pray with confidence. We have the promise that He will take care of His own, and He will never go back on His Word.

said, Here *is* Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

¹² And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

¹³ And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

¹⁴ And Elisha said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

¹⁵ But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.

¹⁶ And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches.

¹⁷ For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

¹⁸ And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

¹⁹ And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

²⁰ And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there

Jehoram pleaded with Elisha to pray for him. He knew now that without God's help they would soon all be dead men.

Digging Ditches

This was the message from God: "Make this valley full of ditches. . . . Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts." There was going to be water -- lots of water. But they would have to work for it. They would have to dig the ditches. Digging ditches was hard work, especially when they were famishing for water. They must either dig or die. God did not need their help in sending them water, but He knew it was good for them to do something. And He wanted to see if they would be obedient to His command.

A Little Thing

Usually before it rains we feel the wind blowing the clouds our way. Or even if we do not feel it, we can see the clouds moving. Sometimes the wind blows water along the ground from a lake or river. But God was not going to use any wind this time. The water would just flow into the ditches, with seemingly no help. God said, "This is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD." The God who made the water could surely direct some of it into the barren desert. This was only a little thing with God, but it meant the difference between life and death to the armies of three nations.

God said at another time, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27). Is there anything that God cannot do? When we pray to Him, do we tell Him our problems with that confidence that we know God can do anything? When we ask Him to heal our bodies, do we remember that with Him it is just a little thing?

Think how God answered prayer for Job. It was because Job believed the promises of God. This is what Job said: "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2). God knows what we think, when no one else does. If God can do that, is there anything that He cannot do?

The Sun on the Water

The water flowed into the ditches, just as God had said it would. When the sun came up and shone upon the water, the Moabites thought it was blood. They thought that there had been trouble in the camp of Israel, and that the soldiers had killed one another. They thought they could just go in and help themselves to everything the Israelites had left.

What a surprise they had when they got into the camp of the Israelites and found the soldiers all bristling for battle! Everyone was armed, ready to fight. The Moabites turned and ran, with the Israelites right behind them. They chased the Moabites clear back to their own country, wrecked the cities, filled their wells, cut down all the good trees, and even threw rocks on their farm land. When the king of Moab saw his country in ruin, he still tried to go against the king of Edom with a small army, but he could gain no foothold.

Such was Israel's victory when they called upon God to help them. Alone they were helpless and ready to die; with God they could conquer and utterly destroy their foe. Let us remember that we can, with God on our side, overcome every power of Satan.

QUESTIONS

1. For what purpose had Elisha received the power of God?
2. What was Elisha's first miracle after crossing Jordan?
3. What does the Bible say about the willing and obedient?
4. What happened to the children who made fun of Elisha?
5. What lesson do we learn from the children's punishment?
6. Who ruled Israel at this time? and what kind of king was he?
7. Why did he want to go to battle against Moab?

came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

²¹ And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border.

²² And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side *as* red as blood:

²³ And they said, This *is* blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

²⁴ And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in *their* country.

²⁵ And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about *it*, and smote it.

²⁶ And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through *even* unto the king of Edom: but they could not.

²⁷ Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him *for* a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own* land.

8. Describe the king of Israel's plans to conquer Moab.
9. What caused his plans to fail?
10. How did the Israelites finally win the battle?