

Week 9: Water and Mocking Youth: 2 Kings 2:19–25; 2 Kings 3:11–20

Hook



Main Point: Rejecting God leads to death, but choosing God leads to life and blessing.

Q: Are you a fan of gameshows? Which is your favorite and why?

Let's Make a Deal launched on NBC in 1963. Hosted by Monty Hall, the program enjoyed massive success, holding the world's record for the longest waiting list for tickets in television – a two-to-three-year wait for the opportunity to attend a taping.¹ The game challenged a participant to choose between a known prize and a mystery prize. Today, our LifeGroup will play our own version. Teacher, bring up a volunteer and hold up a visible prize (candy/book/gift card). Place a box or bag beside it. Invite the volunteer to choose the visible prize or the unknown gift. Then reveal what's under the box.

Q: Have you ever chosen something that *looked good* but turned out to not be best?

Transition: Life is full of choices. In today's passage, we'll be reminded that some choices are clear. Choosing God leads to life and blessing — but rejecting Him leads somewhere very different.

RECAP: In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God's messengers calling His people to repent and how their ministry pointed ahead to Jesus. In week 2, we saw God's provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence for Israel's idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised the widow's son from the dead, which not only showed His sovereign power, but also His care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations, not just Israel. In lesson 4, we saw God's superiority over other "gods" as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In lesson 5, Elijah ran for his life from the wrath of Jezebel and found refuge in the Lord. God spoke to Him not in the thunder and lightning but in the still, small voice. In lesson 6, Elijah called Elisha to succeed him, and Elisha left his old life behind. Elijah prophesied the deaths of Jezebel and Ahab, but the end of his dynasty was delayed because Ahab repented. Ahab's first son died because he worshipped false

gods, and his second son became king. In lesson 7, Elijah was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind, and Elisha took over his ministry with the same Holy Spirit upon him. In lesson 8, we explored exactly what it meant when Elisha asked Elijah for a “double portion” of his spirit.

In this lesson, we will see God bring judgment on those who reject His prophets and His message but bring life, healing and blessing to those who come to Him.

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Book

Main Point: Rejecting God leads to death, but choosing God leads to life and blessing.

2 Kings 2:19–22 and Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34 [Read]

Talking Point 1: God reverses the curse and brings healing, restoration and life.

Q: Why did God curse Jericho (Joshua)? Who rebuilt it and what happened (1 Kings)?

When Elisha crossed back over the Jordan River, he was in Jericho. This was a re-creation of the path the second generation of Israelites followed when they first entered the Holy Land for the conquest. The first generation died in the wilderness because they didn't believe God could take the land for them, and in the first battle of Jericho, God proved He could. That entire battle was supernatural. All the army did was march and yell and the walls fell down. But Elisha wasn't on a mission to fight physical battles; his mission was spiritual.

At Jericho, the people complained to Elisha that their water was contaminated. Jericho sits near the Jordan Rift Valley, an area with heavy mineral deposits. Jericho is the lowest city in the world (800 feet below sea level) and the oldest city discovered by archaeologists. It is near the Dead Sea, called that because no aquatic life can live in the water due to its high salt content. The sea is landlocked with no outflow, so salts and minerals have accumulated over time. The salinity level is around 35 percent, nearly 10 times higher than ocean water.² As the elders said to Elisha, the city was strategically located. It also looked beautiful and fertile; it was called the "City of Palm Trees." But the water was bad, so the land was unfruitful. This was analogous to the spiritual lives of many of God's people at the time; they looked righteous on the outside, doing all the right religious things, but their hearts were far from God so they bore no fruit.

Theologically, this story is interesting because when God destroyed the city of Jericho in the first "battle" of the conquest, Joshua pronounced a curse on whoever rebuilt it (Joshua 6:26). The city lay desolate for more than 500 years until Hiel of Bethel rebuilt it under King Ahab, the evil king Elijah preached against. So, at this point in the story, it had been rebuilt within the last 20 years or so. Just as Joshua had prophesied, rebuilding that city cost Hiel the lives of his firstborn and youngest sons (1 Kings 16:34). It is highly unlikely that Hiel was unaware of this curse; it's much more likely that he blatantly disregarded it. Ahab's regime promoted Baal as the storm god of fertility. Rebuilding the city mocked Yahweh's curse, lauding Baal as greater.

But that hadn't worked. Not only did Hiel personally endure the curse of losing his sons to the project, but the land was not fruitful because of the water. Baal was not the god of fertility they thought he was. God could have just left the people to endure the consequences of their own disobedience. He could have said, "I told you not to rebuild

that city!” But our God is the God of grace, mercy and lovingkindness. So Elisha purified the water, just as God had purified the waters at Marah in the Exodus generation even though all they did was grumble against Moses in the wilderness (Exodus 15:22–27).

Elisha’s using salt to purify the too-salty water is theologically deliberate. The salt didn’t make the water drinkable, obviously; adding salt would have only made it worse. It was God who healed the water. Salt was a symbol of purity, preservation and covenant faithfulness (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19). God was purifying what had been cursed by their covenant unfaithfulness. Reflecting the covenant blessings and curses of life versus death and fruitfulness versus barrenness, God was restoring life where there was barrenness. Salt usually sterilizes land, but God used it to restore life. God can transform what is cursed into a source of blessing. This miracle reflects a shift in Elisha’s ministry compared to Elijah’s. While Elijah primarily preached judgment and curse on Ahab and the people for their idolatry, Elisha’s ministry focused on restoration and healing.

This miracle points us back to when God healed the waters at Marah, but it also points us ahead to Christ, who called Himself the Living Water. When Jesus met the woman at the well, it was a different well in a different city. Yet, when Jesus called Himself the living water, He was speaking to a Samaritan woman, a descendant of that same northern kingdom where Ahab had been so disobedient, and pagan Gentiles had intermixed with the Israelites over centuries. Jesus told her that those who come to Him will have a spring of water *inside* them giving eternal life. Anyone who is thirsty can come to Jesus and receive life – Jew, Gentile, Samaritan, anyone (Isaiah 55:1; John 3:16). Elisha’s healing of the waters at Jericho points ahead to this spiritual reality that no one is beyond redemption and restoration in Christ. As Elisha reversed the curse of Jericho, Jesus reversed the curse of sin and death for all who trust in Him (Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 6:23).

Q: What does Jesus’ description of Himself as “living water” reveal about who He is and what He offers to people?

Q: How have you seen God take difficult things in your life and turn them into blessings or use them for good?

2 Kings 2:23–25 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Those who reject God experience judgment and death.

Q: What did the young men say to Elisha to mock him?

This story is one people often think is really weird and quite harsh. But when we read it in the context of the miracle right before it, it makes a lot more sense theologically. These two stories are an intentional contrast; they show opposite responses to God. The men of Jericho approached Elisha respectfully and asked for his help. Because they acknowledged God’s prophet, God brought healing and life to their city. But

immediately afterward, when Elisha was on his way to Bethel, some young men of that city mocked him and God brought death.

Bethel was a significant place in the history of Israel. When the second generation entered the land during the conquest (1405 BC), Bethel (“house of God”) is where they placed the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant, where God’s Spirit dwelled among His people in the holy of holies. This is where the priests offered sacrifices and the people came to worship before David brought the ark to Jerusalem (1050 BC) and Solomon built the permanent temple in Jerusalem (996 BC). Bethel was the center of their worship for more than 350 years, when they first lived in the Promised Land.

When the nation split (930 BC), Jeroboam didn’t want the people of Israel (N) to go to Jerusalem to worship because it was in Judah (S). So, he established two competing places of worship where he placed golden calves, one very far north at Dan and one very far south at Bethel, technically in Judah but right on the border of Judah and Israel. So, Bethel represented both Israel’s faithfulness during the time of Joshua and their idolatry starting with Jeroboam (although they had been going back and forth between idolatry and faithfulness the whole time). By Elisha’s time, Bethel had become a center of spiritual rebellion against the Lord. The story of mocking Elisha reflects a broader culture of hostility toward God’s prophets, not just some children teasing an old man for being bald, as it can seem out of context.

The language used reflects something stronger than just children’s teasing. The ESV says “small boys,” but the Hebrew word can mean a boy, teen or young adult. The word translated “jeered” is not just teasing, as small children would do. It is scoffing with great contempt and arrogance. Their taunt to “go up” mocked Elijah’s departure and challenged Elisha’s prophetic power. “Baldhead” wasn’t calling Elisha old; he was relatively young at this point. In the ancient Near East, hair was a symbol of manly strength and prowess. “Baldhead” may have been a scornful way to challenge Elisha’s dignity, to shame him. They were treating God’s prophet with contempt.³

Elisha cursed them in the name of the Lord. This wasn’t personal revenge; it was judgment for their mocking God. Mauling by she-bears may seem kind of out of the blue, but it comes directly from God’s curses of the covenant: “If you remain hostile toward me ... I will send wild animals against you and they will rob you of your children” (Leviticus 26:21–22 NIV). This was a covenant curse for rejecting God Himself. From here, Elisha went to Mount Carmel, the site of Elijah’s challenge of the prophets of Baal. This incident was not just about some kids teasing Elisha for being bald. It was about Israel’s rejection of Yahweh as God. Jericho, in Judah (S), had trusted in Elisha and his God, but Bethel, in Israel (N), had rejected Him.

Jesus also pronounced woe to those who rejected His message (Matthew 11:20–24) and to religious leaders who didn’t practice what they preached (Matthew 23). He drove out the money changers from the temple (John 2:15). He lamented over Jerusalem’s continuing rejection of the prophets instead of listening to their message and repenting

(Matthew 23:37–39). Though He never cursed any people, He did curse the fig tree for its lack of fruitfulness as a symbol of the spiritual barrenness of Israel, like the barrenness of the land of Jericho before Elisha healed the waters. Like the difference between the men of Bethel and Jericho, those who reject Christ experience death while those who accept His Gospel message experience eternal life (John 3:18–19, 36; 12:48).

Q: What are some common ways people reject God, and what are some reasons people choose not to follow Him? Please answer generally without naming specific individuals.

Q: What does this story make you want to say to people who reject God?

Q: How does this story contrast with what happened at Jericho?

2 Kings 3:11–20 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When we choose God, we are choosing life, blessing and abundance.

Q: Why did Elisha help the kings even though Israel had been unfaithful?

Q: How is this miracle like the miracle at Jericho? What does this tell us?

Ahab's second son to take the throne, Jehoram, did evil but not as much as his parents. He destroyed the altar of Baal but continued the worship of Jeroboam's golden calves. When the king of Moab rebelled against Jehoram, he asked the king of Judah and the king of Edom (the descendants of Esau) to fight Moab with him. The armies made a circuitous march for seven days and could not find water. This is another touchback to the battle of Jericho when God's people marched around Jericho for seven days. But that time, they were obeying God's instructions; this time Jehoram had just decided to attack Moab himself. The king of Judah asked if there were a prophet of Yahweh so they could ask God what to do and one of the servants suggested Elisha. The phrase "poured water on the hands of Elijah" referred to his role as Elijah's servant and close disciple who lived with him and learned directly from him.

Initially, Elisha told Jehoram to go ask the prophets of Baal instead. The people of Israel had rejected Yahweh; why were they asking His advice now? Jehoram said it was Yahweh who had called these three kings together. Israel, Judah and Edom all traced their lineage back to Abraham, who had originally received the covenant of promise from Yahweh. Elisha agreed to help, but only because of the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, who was faithful to Yahweh (2 Chronicles 17:7–19; 20:32). Elisha's father's name was Shaphat ("judge") and Jehoshaphat means "Yahweh judges."

Elisha asked for a musician. In the Old Testament, music related to the movement of the Holy Spirit. When Saul encountered a procession of prophets playing instruments, the Holy Spirit came upon him mightily (1 Samuel 10:5–11). When he was being attacked by an evil spirit, David’s music drove the spirit away (1 Samuel 16:23). In temple worship, prophesying was accompanied with instruments (1 Chronicles 25:1). When this musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha. Elisha prophesied that the dry streambed would be filled with water without any rain, enough so the whole army and all their animals could drink. As God supernaturally healed the water at Jericho, He supernaturally brought water to the armies at Moab. These two accounts of God’s bringing water create bookends around the story of judgment at Bethel: life – death – life.

These three historical events together show us that God is the source of blessing and life, but judgment falls on those who reject Him. This frames judgment in a different light: it’s not about God’s punishing us, it’s about us choosing or rejecting Him. Because God is the source of life and blessing, when we reject Him, we are rejecting life and blessing. We are choosing death. This echoes the plea of Moses to the people of God when they recommitted to the covenant just before entering the Promised Land. They had just read the blessings and the curses of the covenant, and Moses said, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ... Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19b). The truth is simple: God is the source of life and blessing; false gods only lead to death and destruction. So why, then, do people still choose false gods? Why do we reject the source of life, blessing, goodness and love for something lesser that only leads to death?

The bookends of these three events are encouraging because the story doesn’t end with judgment. Death and destruction do not get the final word. Judgment is surrounded by God’s grace, blessing, and provision.

This reflects God’s character. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He described Himself as both just and merciful (Exodus 34:6–7). God is holy, so He cannot ignore sin or leave it unpunished. But He is also compassionate and eager to show mercy (Isaiah 30:18). God’s desire is not simply to bring judgment, condemnation, and death, but to bring people to repentance and give them life (1 Timothy 2:4).

Q: In what ways have you experienced God’s bringing life, renewal or blessing into your life?

Q: How have you seen that following other “gods” leads to death and destruction? What would you tell others who are following those paths?

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Took

Main Point: Rejecting God leads to death, but choosing God leads to life and blessing.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. —John 10:10

There is none more miserable than a Christian who chases the things of this world instead of following Christ. When we live outside God's will, we feel restless under the Spirit's conviction, disconnected from our purpose, and deprived of the joy that only He can give. Succumbing to the Enemy's temptations brings loss, emptiness and destruction.

But choosing to submit every part of our lives to Jesus – day by day, moment by moment – brings abundant, purposeful and vibrant life.

Teacher: Share your testimony – or ask a prepared LifeGroup member – about how choosing Christ has transformed your life. Highlight the blessings, the peace and the joy that come from following Him faithfully.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about what it means to choose God. What other things can we choose to follow, worship, and serve in this life? Why do we choose those things instead of God? If we really believe God is the source of blessing, life and everything good, how does that affect the way we live and the choices we make? In what ways does your life need to change in order to follow God fully?

PRAY: Pray for those who are rejecting God right now. Pray for their eyes to be opened, their hearts to be changed, and for them to repent and turn to the Lord. Ask for the right words to say to them to show them how good it is to trust in Jesus, how it brings healing, life and blessing to your life. Pray for your sanctification, that you would grow in faithfulness and fruitfulness.

ACT: Choose life. Reflect on all the choices you make in an average week. Which of your choices are leading to life and blessing, and which are leading to death and destruction? Make an intentional commitment this week to only make choices that lead to life. Wake up and start your days by saying to yourself, "Choose life." Repeat that to yourself throughout your day, all day long.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marchberman1/2024/12/30/lets-make-a-deal-debuted-on-this-day-in-1963-a-tv-flashback/>

² Christopher Eames, "Uncovering the Bible's Buried Cities: Jericho," *Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology*, Jan 24, 2020.

³ Thomas L. Constable, "[2 Kings](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 542.