

The miracle at Cana, and the Elisha connection

by Douglas E. Cox

Gary T. Manning Jr. has investigated several allusions to the stories of Elijah and Elisha in the New Testament. One of these allusions was in the account of Jesus turning water to wine in the Gospel of John, which connects with an event in the life of Elisha, when the kings of Israel and Judah and of Edom went out into the wilderness with their armies in order to punish the king of Moab, who had stopped paying tribute to the Israelite king. But they ran short of water, so they called for the prophet Elisha. Manning discussed this in "I Am Not Elijah, Part 2 (John 2:3-4, 2 Kings 3:9-22)".

The connection between the stories is the question common to both, "What have I to do with thee?" Elisha asked this of the king of Israel when he was asked to help. [2 Kings 3:13] In the LXX, the phrase is: *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*. Jesus spoke the same words to his mother, when she asked for his help at the wedding in Cana.

Elisha advised the kings to dig ditches, and in the morning, the ditches filled up with water that came from out of the land of Edom. Manning wrote of the connection between the Elisha story, and the miracle that Jesus performed at Cana.

It is common for commentaries on John to refer to 2 Kings 3:22 (along with Jdg 11:18, 2 Chr 35:21, 1 Kgs 17:18, and Hos 14:8) as an example of the idiom *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί* in John 2:4. However, John 2:4 has never been seen as an allusion to 2 Kgs 3:22 until recently. Mickey Klink's recent article ably demonstrated that Jesus' miracle in John 2 is told in a manner designed to recall Elisha's water miracle.

Although the exact verbal parallel extends only to the phrase *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*, there is significant resonance between the two passages. In 2 Kings 3, water for the army runs out, the king asks Elisha for help, and the man of God responds with *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*. Despite his initial reluctance, Elisha helps. He gives some rather strange commands;

once the commands are obeyed, the water miraculously arrives, filling the trenches. In John 2, wine for the wedding runs out, Mary asks Jesus for help, and Jesus responds with *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*. Despite his initial reluctance, Jesus helps. He gives some rather strange commands; once the commands are obeyed, the water miraculously turns to wine, filling the water jars.

If this is a genuine allusion, as seems possible, then it clears up the mystery of why Jesus at first appears to refuse, then helps anyway. The conversation between Jesus and his mother is designed to point to Jesus' similarity to Elisha. His initial refusal does not really make sense in John's story, but it does make sense in its original context in 2 Kings 3. This is the nature of many quotations and allusions to the OT: when they are removed from their original context and placed in the NT, slight irregularities are introduced. In some cases, minor grammatical irregularities occur, as when the tense of verbs do not match the new context or the pronouns are not quite appropriate for the new context. In other cases, the meaning of the original text goes through small distortions as it is placed in a new context.

Elisha had advised the kings to make ditches in the valley, which became filled up with water, and as the sun rose in the morning, the Moabite army looked over the valley, and saw the reflection of the red sky on the water, which appeared to them like pools of blood.

2 Kings 3:21-23

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

Assuming there had been a battle, the Moabites approached the camp of the Israelites, expecting to find them wasted, but instead they were slaughtered themselves. Enemies of the gospel are much like those unfortunate Moabites, who mistook water for blood. Unbelievers view the Scriptures, and its prophecies, and accounts of miraculous events, as if they were *blood*, unfit for human consumption. The gospel, which is as cool, clean, fresh drinking water to believers, is as distasteful as *blood* to them.

There is a connection between the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 3 and the prophecy about the two witnesses, in Revelation 11:6, who have power to "turn the waters to blood." The powers attributed to the two witnesses in the prophecy allude to events connected with Moses, Elijah, and Elisha.

Jesus identified the Spirit of God, and the Scriptures, as two things which *testify* of him, and so they are *two witnesses*. The spiritual interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures is often viewed by unbelievers as distasteful and abhorrent. This attitude is represented figuratively as "turning waters to blood." Jesus referred to the gospel as "living water," [John 4:10] but the unbelievers, who are deceived, view it as if it were something they cannot drink, or figuratively, as "blood."

Jesus also established a connection between wine and blood in the cup shared at the Lord's supper; "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." [Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 10:16]

In summary, while John's account of the miracle at Cana alludes to the first part of the Elisha story, as discussed by Manning, John possibly alludes to the last part of the story, about the armies of the Moabites mistaking water for blood, and their subsequent defeat by the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom, in the prophecy of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. This points to a link between the two works, and tends to support the conclusion that both were written by the apostle John.