

Turning waters to blood

by Douglas E. Cox

"They have power to turn the waters to blood" is part of the description of the two witnesses [Revelation 11:6]. In this article, the two witnesses are understood to represent the Scriptures, and the Spirit, the two things that Jesus said testify of him. [John 5:39; 15:26]

The waters in the prophecy signify the prophetic Scriptures. Blood signifies something that contaminates, that men cannot eat, or drink. Blood was forbidden to all men in Genesis. God said, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." [Genesis 9:4] It was forbidden to Israel in the law of Moses. "Ye shall not eat any thing with the blood." [Leviticus 19:26]

Two witnesses turning the waters to blood is a figure that signifies truths of the gospel (waters) being expressed in symbolic language (blood), which hides their meaning, and makes them seem incredible, so that men will not believe.

The waters being turned to blood (figuratively) is one of the effects of the symbolic, metaphorical language employed in prophecy. Daniel was told that his prophecies would be understood by the wise, but by none of the wicked. [Daniel 12:10]

Amos wrote: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." [Amos 3:7]

The hidden things of God remain secret to most men, and to the wise, but He reveals his secret to the humble. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." [Matthew 11:25-26] James wrote: "Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." [James 4:6]

In Egypt, when Moses turned the waters of Egypt to blood, the plague affected the river, and the Egyptians who could not drink the waters dug holes in the shores of the river to obtain water. Whether the Israelites were affected by the plague is not stated. [Exodus 7:17]

Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 28:9-13

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Isaiah said that prophecy would be given in "another tongue," which implies it must be interpreted, to be understood. The language of prophecy is the language of metaphors, figures, parables, and similitudes. The reason Isaiah gave for this was not to reveal, but to *conceal* its meaning.

Often, the superficial, literal language of prophecy appears to us like "blood." It cannot be accepted, either because it contradicts other Scriptures, or it states things that seem fantastic, or incredible. Only when properly interpreted, does it make sense. The interpretation of a prophecy reveals its meaning, and God's message for us. The interpretation is usually not found in the prophecy itself, but lies elsewhere in Scripture. This is shown by Isaiah's words, "But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

A search of Scripture is needed to discover the clues for the interpretation of prophecy.

The apostle Peter confirmed this principle. He wrote:

2 Peter 1:19-21

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

These teachings of Isaiah and of the apostle Peter are basic precepts that must be understood to understand prophecy. There are no Scriptures that support the idea promoted by dispensationalist writers, that claims prophecy should be understood according to the superficial, woodenly literal sense. This is failure to interpret.

The parables and sayings of Jesus may be studied as examples of prophetic language and interpretation. Although Jesus gave the interpretations for many of his parables, which illustrate how prophecy may be interpreted, some of his teachings are explained more fully in Revelation. The "white stone" of Revelation 2:17 and the twelve gates of the holy city in Revelation 21:21 may each allude to Jesus' parable of the pearl of great price. [Matthew 13:46]

As for the parables, Jesus is the source of their true interpretation. The same is true of prophecy. This is illustrated in Revelation 5, where John shows that no man either in heaven or earth, or

under the earth, was able to open the book sealed with seven seals, representing the events contained in the prophecies of Revelation.

Revelation 5:2-4

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

Then John showed that Jesus alone has the power to interpret prophecy.

“And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Revelation 5:5, 8-10

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Jesus exploited the metaphorical meanings of prophecy. Consider his reference to leaven, when he said to his disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” [Matthew 16:6] They thought that he meant that they ought to have brought along some bread, but he explained that he meant metaphorical leaven, a symbol for the doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus said to the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” [John 2:19] He meant the temple of his body, but the Jews, failing to interpret his words, took it to mean the Jerusalem temple, which was then under construction. His saying would make little sense when it was given, but after Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples realized its meaning, as a prophecy about Jesus’ resurrection. Until then, this saying would have seemed like “blood,” yet there was a profound truth hidden in it.

Jesus’ saying, “this generation shall not pass, till all be fulfilled” is another saying that he exploited, knowing that men would misunderstand it. He rose from the grave, and remains alive forever, and so his generation continues forever. It is a unique generation. Everything Jesus foretold, including things yet future, must occur within his generation, which will never pass away. Only in the light of his resurrection is the meaning of this saying understood. His generation is not limited to the first century A.D.

Jesus spoke of his body as “manna,” and bread from heaven, which men should eat. He said:

John 6:56-58

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

This saying was so obscure, some of his disciples turned away from following him because of it. He identified with manna because he is the Word, and his teachings are the bread of life that came from heaven, for his Church in the wilderness.

In the following saying, Jesus refers to the heavenly Jerusalem:

Luke 13:33

Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

In fact, many prophets died outside the earthly Jerusalem. Jesus was crucified "without the gate."

Hebrews 13:12

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Jesus continued:

Luke 13:34

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

All the prophets were included in the heavenly city, whether they died at Jerusalem, or in another location. They are the foundation of the temple, together with the apostles. [Ephesians 2:20] It cannot be that a prophet perish out of the *heavenly* Jerusalem.

The waters that are turned to blood by the two witnesses are truths of the gospel.

In Genesis there are several stories connected with wells, and digging of them, and conversations with women at the wells; Jacob meeting Rachel; Abraham's servant finding a bride for Isaac. Jesus revealed important spiritual truths to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well at Sychar. [John 4:1-38] The stories connected with wells suggest the promised land has a spiritual significance, that one must dig to discover. The beginning of romantic relationships at wells is a theme that applies to the Church, which is Christ's spouse.

Isaiah connected God's word with rain.

Isaiah 55:9-11

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Here, rain and snow represent God's word.

Paul used the metaphor of washing with water, to describe the role of the Scriptures. He wrote:

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The waters which the two witnesses turn to blood is the knowledge of God, which is figuratively turned to blood in prophecy. God's word is presented to us in metaphors and figures borrowed from scenes of bloody battles, such as those between the ancient Israelites and their Canaanite foes. Spiritual war is waged over the interpretation of prophecy; the battles of the saints are spiritual ones. [Ephesians 6:12] The blood shed in these spiritual battles is metaphorical; the adversaries are slain spiritually. Doctrines of men are discredited when the truth is revealed.

Eating blood was forbidden to the Israelites. The Law said, "Ye shall not eat any thing with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times." [Leviticus 19:26] "Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water." [Deuteronomy 12:16]

Consuming blood was proscribed for Gentile Christians. James wrote to them,

Acts 15:20

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

In Egypt, when Moses turned the waters to blood, they became undrinkable. [Exodus 7:20]

Blood was associated with battles and wars, and was spilled on fields of battle, when armies armed with swords, spears, bows and arrows, etc., fought each other. In the spiritual warfare of the saints, the sword of God's word sheds blood, and kills, but the victims are not humans. Paul said:

Ephesians 6:12

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.