

THE MIRACLE IN THE MORNING

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And he [Elisha] said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. 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... And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:16-17, 20).

During prolonged droughts in southern Africa, the need for water becomes acute, and periodically farmers convene special meetings in which to pray for rain. Sandy river beds provide playgrounds for children and ideal sites for picnics. A friend explained to me how he nearly lost his life on such an outing. The family was about to enjoy a meal when they heard a roaring sound coming from the direction of the mountains. Quickly they climbed to the top of the river banks, but they were only just in time, for a wall of water rushed down the arid bed sweeping away a phonograph, baby carriage, and their picnic baskets and food. A storm in the distant mountains had sent torrents of water rushing down the river bed, and if they had not responded immediately to the warning given by the father, all would have drowned. Yet, so my friend informed me, within an hour the water had disappeared, and calm was restored to the area.

Thousands of years ago in Israel a similar thing happened, but unfortunately, the account remains an unfamiliar story within the Scriptures. During the reign of Ahab, the king of Moab had been compelled to pay an enormous tribute to his conqueror. This meant a considerable loss to the nation's resources, for annually the king forfeited 100,000 lambs and 100,000 unshorn rams. After the death of Ahab when Jehoram succeeded his father, Mesha the king of Moab refused to continue the annual payment, and this aroused the anger of Israel's king. Believing help was needed to overcome the reluctant enemy, he sought assistance from the kings of Judah and Moab, and together they planned to subdue the rebellion. Unfortunately, they approached through the desert, and according to Josephus, when their guide took the wrong route in the wilderness, the united forces were soon in jeopardy. Their thirst became so intense, it was feared the men would die in the desert. It was that possibility that made the king of Israel exclaim, "Alas, that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab! But Jehoshaphat (the king of Judah) said, Is there not here a

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prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah... So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him" (2 Kings 3:10-12).

The Peace of God... How Achievable

"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. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him" (2 Kings 3:14-15). Evidently Elisha was upset as he contemplated the evil that had been wrought by the family of Ahab. He detested everything that the king represented, and even as he looked at the hypocritical ruler, his soul was filled with disgust. Apparently the prophet realized he was not in the right mood to listen to the whispers of God. The Lord said to David, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). The prophet Elisha appreciated the same message. How could he or

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anyone else listen to the voice of the Almighty when his soul was disturbed? He called for a minstrel and listened to the haunting melodies of the musician. Slowly, peace and tranquility were restored, and as the realization of the divine presence thrilled his heart, the prophet delivered his message.

Earth-born clouds that eclipse the Sun of Righteousness are a menace. Even when anger seems to be justified, anything that destroys the sanctity of the human temple must be regarded as dangerous. Cleland B. McMee was correct when he wrote:

There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.

O Jesus, blest Redeemer,
Sent from the heart of God,
Hold us who wait before Thee,
Near to the heart of God.

Sometimes people permit circumstances to destroy their serenity; they act hastily and say and do things not reflecting the majesty of God

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I remember occasions when annoyance appeared to demand a certain course of action, when my mother said, "Son, sleep on it; you will be more able to handle the matter in the morning." She was always correct. and I would have been wise had I followed her advice more often. Sometimes I became irritable and impetuously desired retaliation. The words of John Whittier were God's minstrel in my life.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
`Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess,
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm,
Let sense be dumb, Let flesh retire,
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire
O still small voice of calm.

The Promise of God... How Assuring

"And he [Elisha] said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. 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" (2 Kings 3: 16-17).

When Elisha continued his message saying, "And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand" (2 Kings 3:18), Jehoshaphat the king of Judah rejoiced and believed God's promise. The soldiers of the three armies began to dig in the dry watercourse, and the entire landscape was quickly changed. Possibly those men were obeying orders. There is no evidence that they believed what Elisha had promised. Perhaps they thought it was better to work than to stand around doing nothing. The faith of Jehoshaphat was remarkable, for although there were no signs of an approaching storm, he believed water would be forthcoming. Long afterward the writer to the Hebrews wrote, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). That fact was clearly expressed in the attitude of

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the king of Judah.

Perhaps the kings of Israel and Moab scoffed, for the cloudless skies seemed to mock their efforts. It was extremely unlikely that

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help would be forthcoming. The promise of the prophet appeared to be ludicrous. Elisha's faith was evident; he was assured that nothing was too hard for Jehovah to accomplish. It is not known how the many soldiers found implements with which to dig. If their equipment included small shovels, their task would have been simplified. If not, they improvised or used their hands to dig the ditches in the sand. Their efforts provided the strangest scene mentioned in the Bible. When they realized their existence depended upon the prophet whose commands they were obeying, their objections were silenced. Finally their task was completed; mounds of earth were everywhere, and the river bed was filled with innumerable ditches.

The Plan of God... How Accurate

"And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Moab, and the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:20). Josephus, the Jewish historian, said, "When the prophet had said this, the next day, before the sun rising, a great torrent ran strongly; for God had caused it to rain very plentifully at the distance of three days journey into Edom, so that the army and the cattle found water to drink in abundance" (Antiquities 9.3.2). It remains unclear what Josephus meant when he said the storm burst at a distance of three days into Edom. That distance would not be great for a man to walk, but if Josephus meant a three-day camel ride, the storm could have been located much farther away. The matter is of small importance, for it was the time of the arrival of the water that was impressive.

God had instructed Israel to offer two lambs every day, one in the morning, the other in the evening (see Ex. 29:38-42). It was significant that in spite of their acute thirst and the continuation of their problems, the people did not forget to honor the Lord and observe His commandments. It might have been easy to believe He had forsaken His people, but whatever the circumstances seemed to suggest, the priests proceeded to observe the commandments of God, and as they did, the water reached the camp. Many years later, the Savior said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). God's timing was perfect, and as the soldiers watched the torrent of water, they appreciated the wisdom of the prophet who commanded them to dig ditches

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After great storms, the beds of rivers quickly fill until the currents become impassable. Yet when the storm abates and the rain ceases, the stream quickly disappears. If the soldiers had not prepared ditches, the river would have subsided, and the need of the armies would have remained unchanged. Elisha's foresight was remarkable, for after the torrent had passed, sufficient water remained in the ditches to quench the thirst of that expeditionary force. God sees the end from the beginning, and happy are the people who follow His directions.

The Provision of God... How Abundant

"That valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand... and the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:17-20).

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It should be remembered that to feed three armies it was necessary to have many animals available for slaughter. Dromedaries can carry sufficient water over great distances, but cattle need water every day. God was very generous! He saw the immense need of the men and beasts and sent sufficient supplies for their survival.

To curb the aggression of Iraq against Kuwait, a multi-national force went to Saudi Arabia, and vast supplies of material were necessary to sustain hundreds of thousands of men. It was interesting to hear American soldiers saying by means of radio and television, "Send us water!" Special ships were sent carrying this invaluable commodity. To understand this problem is to appreciate the desperation with which the ancient kings sought the assistance of Elisha. They recognized the fact that without help they would die in that merciless desert. Sometimes the Lord permits His people to get into trouble so that their understanding may be increased. Only then are they able to exclaim, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). The stillness that filled the camp during the offering of the meat offering was suddenly shattered as exultant soldiers rushed toward the ditches to plunge their faces into the refreshing water. Nevertheless, that was only a part of the deliverance which God had promised. He had said, "And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD."

The Power of God... How Amazing

"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

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armor 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. 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" (2 Kings 3:21-24).

The Rev. G. Rawlinson, writing in The Pulpit Commentary, says, "The Wady-el Haday drains a portion of Southern Moab and also a considerable tract of Northern Moab. The nocturnal storm had burst, not in the Moabite country where it would have attracted the attention of the Moabites, but in some comparatively distant part of the Idumaeen territory... The red hue of the water is ascribed by Ewald to the red tinge of the soil in the part of Moab where the rain had fallen

... and by Keil to 'the reddish earth of the freshly dug trenches,' but the only cause of the redness mentioned in Kings or Josephus is the ruddy hue of the sunrise. The red light falling upon the water in the pits and reflecting the opposite side of the Wady would account for the mistake of the Moabites who concluded the red-looking liquid was blood" (The Pulpit Commentary, 2 Kings, pp. 45-46).

Believing their enemies had embarked upon a course of self-destruction, the Moabites attacked the camp of the Israelites only to discover their assumption was wrong. The three armies were waiting for the assault, and in the ensuing battle the attackers were slain or put to flight.

Each detail of the ancient account supplies evidence that God can do the impossible. The sending of the storm, the time of the arrival of the water, the effect of whatever it was that made the river appear as blood, the mistaken assumption of the Moabites, and the ultimate triumph of God's people suggest that throughout the entire episode everything was controlled by the Almighty. Outstanding among the many onlookers was Elisha, who knew God would do what He promised. When Jehovah divided the Red Sea, "the waters

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were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Ex. 14:22). Yet, when He sent floods rushing down the ancient wadi, the people were commanded to dig ditches which would retain the precious water. These verses suggest that God is equal to every emergency in life, but He expects obedient cooperation from His people. He does not do everything!

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During my stay in South Africa I spoke at a Bible Conference in the district known as the Karroo where the land is irrigated. Every rancher is expected to prepare for the time when water is released from a dam in the distant mountains. Ditches have to be free of obstruction, and the soil graded to enable the water to reach all parts of the farms. I shall always remember a man who testified in one of the meetings. He said, "You all know me. I did not wish to come to these meetings, but I came anyhow! Do you know what I have been doing? I took a shovel and have been opening the channels in my soul. Thank God the water is flowing again. My ditches were all clogged up!" The prophet Ezekiel was correct when he said, "And every thing shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezek. 47:9). It would seem also that David had endured through a similar experience for he wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). All people should know that rivers of living water will surely come, if they remain close to the Lamb of God and the place where He was sacrificed.

Jesus keep me near the cross;
There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream
Flows from Calvary's mountain.
F. J. Crosby

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