

## Signs from God (Exodus 4: 1-20)

I When we do God's work His way, He ensures our success. (Moses would not have known that, on this first day of his career as a servant of God, but we will say again as we have said before: We have the rest of the Bible to inspire us, and he did not. We need to remember that God's work is exactly that, His; it is not ours. We must not try to substitute our own humanistic agendas for God's Sovereign Will. The part of this all that seems to elude most contemporary Christians is the part about *God's Way*. Isaiah tells us that His Ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. God's Way is to choose an unlikely and humble human agent who completely surrenders his or her own will to God, to accomplish His Holy Will, and then use that person's voice, or hands, or feet—the whole life, in fact, to reveal His own glory in our world. Moses would not yet know that. We might forgive his skepticism, but God was not willing to take *no* for an answer. That, too, is part of God's Way. God speaks, and things happen. God chose Moses (Moses did not choose himself) to be His servant, to demand the release of the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt. It is not possible that God will negotiate with Moses about whether Moses will do God's bidding. As we saw last week, Moses did in fact have a choice; we all have. Every conscious behavior is a deliberate choice between 2 or more alternatives. God chose Moses specifically because God knew that Moses would be persuaded; that in the end Moses would accede to His Will.)

A God gave Moses the ability to perform miracles. (Now the signs, the serpent, the leprosy, and the water becoming blood, are for Moses' benefit as well as that of the Hebrews, and of Pharaoh. These miracles persuaded Moses that God was really in charge. The signs will persuade the Hebrews that Moses is really the servant of God. Also, the signs will persuade Pharaoh, eventually, that God is not limited to the tricks his magicians can imitate, not by the sorcerers understanding of spiritual realities, and more importantly that God is and will continue to be God even without Pharaoh's consent. Let us pray that our lessons about these truths are gentler than Pharaoh's were.)

B We must never become so obsessed with signs that we forget to watch the sign-maker.

(Now to be sure, the ability to make real miracles (as opposed to only making people think that some deception or illusion is a miracle) is positive proof of spiritual power. Possession of such power certainly gives one an advantage over those who do not possess it, and the advantage is so desirable that liars and other hypocrites in church work frequently go to a lot of trouble to make other people think they possess it when they don't. So let us make two distinctions immediately and permanently: first, the devil has the ability to imitate miracles from God and sometimes uses it. There is no *miracle* of healing if, for example, the devil holds someone in bondage to alcohol and then during a church meeting, temporarily relieves the symptoms of a hangover. The miracle of healing would be if the alcoholic takes a t-totaler's oath in the Name of Jesus and then never tastes alcohol again. The second distinction is that clever manipulators of crowd psychology can create illusions of having done things when the fact is that they are more familiar with witchcraft than with truth. A case in point is when an American preacher sees an American in a Korean church meeting, raises his voice to greet him as a friend and thanks him for coming. He tells everyone that he wasn't sure that his "friend" would really come, all the way from America to support him—and all this even though they never met— then continues his message, leaving all the Koreans to look around to see the "friend", and to think that if the Americans trust this preacher enough to follow him all the way around the world to support him, then they can trust him too. We need these distinctions so that we can remember that God can manifest His power in spite of physical conditions, like hangovers, and He performs His miracles for His purposes (not those of preachers), and they work without illusions and deceptions.)

II Three specific signs would reveal God's power. (Please remember that for Moses, this burning bush experience was something of an ordeal. He probably knew a little about the God of the Hebrews, but would never have suspected that God would bother with talking to him. How could Moses know that God could help him, or would help

him, to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt? How would he persuade Pharaoh to let them go, or the Hebrews to follow him, or persuade himself, for that matter, that he should return to Egypt and not just stay home to Zipporah and Gershom? Here we see three miracles. We may be sure that the number three is a significant Biblical symbol, but these specific miracles have a much more profound implication for everyone who would witness them, beginning with Moses.)

A The serpent is a powerful symbol of evil. (Satan approached Eve in the form of a serpent, and that was how sin had entered the world. God had told Eve that He would put enmity between her descendants and the descendants of the serpent, and that enmity survives even into our own day. The Bible tells us that the staff of Moses became a serpent and that Moses fled from it. Ought we not all to flee from evil, especially such an immediate manifestation of it? Yet God tells Him to put out his hand and take it by the tail; when he does, it becomes a staff again. This is the power of God, working now by the hand of Moses, to control evil. Incidentally, one way by which farm boys in Missouri kill snakes is to take them by the tail, swing them around and then crack them like a whip, to break their necks. The head of the snake is the dangerous part; but Moses will not be injured by the evil which this new power of his could become as long as he controls that power in the way God tells him to.)

B Leprosy would be regarded as God's warning against disbelief. (Medical science did not understand leprosy or know how to treat it until the late 1940s; and no effective cure was known until 1981. We should note that the average incubation period for the bacteria that causes leprosy is 3-5 years, so the immediate infection of healthy skin tissue could mean only one thing: God was not happy with something that this new leper had said or done. Moses certainly would have understood his own leprous hand in that way; and we may presume that he would show this sign to the Hebrews against the backdrop of their own skepticism. *"What do you mean, you don't believe me? Look what happened to me when I didn't believe God!* Then, showing them his leprous hand

he would have asked them if they wanted to meet a similar fate. Most assuredly, they would not! “*O.K. then, believe God and all will be well*”—and he would have shown them the healing. Now remember that the Children of Israel *wanted* to believe. They were miserable as slaves in Egypt, and they were praying for a deliverer. They might in fact have wondered about God’s choice of Moses for the job, but having seen these signs of God’s power, over evil, and over even leprosy—to infect them with it and to heal them of it—they will trust God enough to trust Moses. Pharaoh will be considerably harder to persuade.)

C Nile River water was the source of life for all Egypt. (Its fish supplied their tables with meat and its springtime floods supplied their fields with fertile topsoil. Now let us remember that for God, blood represents life. The blood of a sacrificial animal was the vicarious atonement by which the lives of Adam and Eve were spared; and as far back as Genesis 9, God put a premium on the blood of man, saying “*And for your lifeblood I will demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God had God made man*” (Genesis 9:4-6). The water of the Nile River represented life for all Egypt, and for God, blood represents the life of humanity. The power to turn the water of the river into blood represents a kind of vulnerability, and a public exposure of that vulnerability, and Moses has that power in his hands. The message to the Egyptians will be quite clear: God has the power of life and death over everyone. Egyptian sorcerers will have some ability to imitate the miracle, as we shall see a few chapters further; but they seem to have forgotten that their magic tricks only imitated the power of God, they did not equal it. The lesson for us is that clever imitators can still imitate some of God’s miracles, and frequently do so in churches; but the imitation is only a copy. The genuine miracle, not their imitation of it, is the real manifestation of the power of God.)

III Signs reveal the power of God, not tricks of magicians, particularly regarding their

ability to manipulate the psychology of an audience. (As we mentioned, the tricks of magicians might imitate signs that God Himself can show. Let us take some specific, Biblical examples. Old Testament prophets spoke for God, and gave kings and others God's Word concerning public policy and bad behavior. In 2 Chronicles 18 we see how some kings gathered men around them who told them what they wanted to hear and *called* it prophecy. We should note that both real and false prophets cited signs by which people could know that *their* prophecies were from God. The difference was, the signs of the real prophets actually happened, whereas those of the false prophets did not. In the Book of I Corinthians, the apostle Paul tells us that faith, hope, and charity are important, but as important as these are, he encouraged believers to prophesy. Now he did not mean that we should think of a desirable change in our or our friends' circumstances and then make a positive profession of our wishful thinking in the name of Jesus. When he spoke of our prophesying, he meant that we should spend enough time praying and meditating in the Word of God that we understand God's thoughts as well as we understand our own, and then speak out for God as if our voice is God's own voice. Only the Holy Spirit can give any of us such a confident understanding of what is in the mind of God. Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit can give us such an illuminated point of view, then He can also show us what God sees in another person's heart and life. So if we proclaim God's truth publicly, that is prophecy. As we noted a few moments ago, any supernatural ability gives one a certain advantage in our interpersonal relationships. So now we understand a little more clearly why there are people in our churches who try so hard to convince us that they have spiritual gifts, whether they really have them or not. That, however, is only the surface of the problem. One very prevalent misunderstanding of spiritual signs involves speaking in tongues. We all know people who think that such a manifestation of the spirit *must* be the first evidence of their own or anyone else's spiritual experience, and they are determined that everyone should think that their experience is authentic. So they preface every other demonstration of

their spiritual ability with speaking in tongues, as if speaking in tongues validates every thing that follows. The hearer, then, is obliged by the validation to receive the prophecy that was delivered “in tongues” (and interpreted by the tongues-speaker, of course), as if it were the very Words of God, and carried equal weight with all other scriptures. Also, every charismatic believer who offers to exhibit the gift of healing prays “in tongues” first, again, as if the blabbering proved that he or she had the power to heal. That, of course, let’s them off the hook if healing does not follow: they spoke in tongues, so the obstacle to healing must be someone else’s insufficient faith. There are so many Biblical problems with that doctrine that we cannot even begin to address them here. Let us say only that spiritual gifts are real or they could not be counterfeited; just as counterfeit currency is frequently a very good copy of the real thing. We must go on to say that the devil also knows how to speak in tongues too, and he knows how to deceive church members who do not understand spiritual signs nearly as well as they understand the erroneous doctrines of liberal churches.)

A We will see how Egyptian sorcerers could imitate the miracles. (God has a lot more power than Moses saw in the staff that changed into a serpent, the infection with and then healing of leprosy, and turning Nile River water into blood. Moses will work a lot more miracles by the power of God. These 3 that we see in Chapter 4 are signs for him, for the Hebrew slaves, and for the Egyptians. Now the Egyptian sorcerers know some tricks of their own. Their abilities to imitate God’s signs will help to harden Pharaoh’s heart, by making him think that Moses (and therefore, his God) has no more power than the Egyptian magicians had. Why should God allow such nonsense to continue? God’s explanation to Moses is that He intends to harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that He might demonstrate His almighty Power to the Children of Israel. The sorcerers will copy nine of the 10 plagues God will send into Egypt, but they will not be able to copy the last one. The Children of Israel will see a display of Divine Power and a clever imitation of it; but as we shall see, they will still not understand God very well.)

B Real faith is a gift from God and needs no sign to aid its work. (Lest we get so involved with the story in Exodus that we forget its applicability to us, we must pause now and then, and remind ourselves what all this means in our lives. Signs from God are, in fact, intended to aid our faith. The signs may come either before, or after, or along with, events that require our trust in God, or the propositions we are asked to accept. Let us remember that the singular most important event of Biblical Prophecy remaining for the future, and which requires our complete trust in God, is the Second Coming of Jesus; and the one proposition we are asked to accept without any equivocation is the Salvation of our immortal souls. Now with these things in mind, what proof do we actually have of our Salvation? We have only the Promise of God, and our trust in His Covenant. There are two signs of that Covenant for us, which Jesus ordained: the Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. What signs do we have of the Second Coming of Jesus? We have only our trust in the authority of the Bible, which contains the prophecies, and the prophetic revelation includes predictions of world events that will immediately precede the Second Coming. So, how do baptism and communion assure us of Salvation; and how can we know that Jesus, Peter, and Paul didn't just make it all up to scare us into faithful church membership? The only thing that might mollify our anxieties is our faith. Do you think it would be nice to have something more substantial? Jesus understood that too: He said, *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas* (Matthew 16:4). The only thing we have to depend on is our faith. That, according to Ephesians 2:9, is a gift from God.)

C Humanistic logic misses the point about signs and miracles. (We say again, real faith is a gift from God. We find that gift by finding the Gift-Giver. We find Him in our prayer life and Bible study. Now is there a miraculous sign by which we will know that we have found Him? There is: it is our re-birth as Children of God. That is the one true miracle that every sincere believer will experience; other miracles may follow later, or

not, depending on the Will of God for you or me. In all cases, we must not allow our humanistic logic to demand miraculous signs before we agree to the proposition of the Holy Gospel: Salvation is by faith in the Grace of God through Jesus Christ, and the faith by which we receive that Salvation is itself a gift of God. And again, we must not allow our humanistic logic to substitute faith in Salvation by Works for Salvation by Grace. That is to say, the baptism and the Lord's Supper are both signs of our New Testament Covenant with God, just as the animal sacrifices and the circumcision were signs of the Old Testament Covenant. As we have seen, the devil and his minions can imitate the signs, and copy the miracles; but only God can make real miracles, and only His Holy Spirit can validate the signs.)

IV God puts His own life into the soul of every believer. (Now that we have taken time to examine the differences between real and counterfeit signs, both in the Book of Exodus and in the contemporary church, we ought also to follow through on this, and recall the goal God expects to achieve by the miracles, of which the signs are the evidence He offers as assistance to our faith. God is all about Life. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all life; He is the Judge Who condemned the human race to death for sin and then made a way for us to live again, with the Eternal Life of His Son Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. As we have seen, God puts that new life in the soul of the believer who repents and forsakes sin, and believes God for Redemption and rebirth. God plants the seed of that new, spiritual life in our souls by means of our faith, which we can possess only by means of His Divine Grace.)

A The Holy Spirit grows in us until we are perfect copies of Jesus. (The Holy Spirit is the Presence of God Himself in our new spiritual lives. He is Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. He is the Word of God, in which our new spiritual life finds its nourishment. He is our Divine Healer and our Eternal Home in Heaven. That Holy Spirit of God Himself grows in our soul like a seedling in a garden. We water our seed with the Living Water, Who is Jesus, and we nurture our seedling with the Bread of Life,

which is the Word of God. You have heard me say that a spirit, any spirit, is the cause of thought, which is the incubus of words and deeds, and the domicile of attitudes. If the Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God, then He will cause holy thoughts, and those thoughts will produce holy words— are there any words more holy than those in the Bible? And holy thoughts will cause holy actions— are there any actions more holy than those of Jesus Christ? No, and until we are holy enough to speak only Words that Jesus Himself would speak and perform only actions that Jesus Himself would perform, we are not holy enough to live in His eternal Home in Heaven, which is why Hebrews 12:14 tells us that *without holiness, no one will see the Lord*. We are born again as Children of God; the only begotten Son of God must be the Teacher Who teaches us how to think, speak, and act; and it is His image to which we are predestined to be conformed, by the foreordained Will of God. Our attitudes then, will be holy, only after we become humble enough to *seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matthew 6:33.)

B There are several evidences of the presence of the Life of Christ in believers. (We spoke momentarily of our regeneration as Children of God. There are certain fruits of the Spirit which will manifest themselves in the lives of believers, because the Holy Spirit is present in our lives These are listed for us in Galatians 5:22-23. They are love, joy, peace, long suffering (or, patience), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (self-control). There will also be a distinct absence of *Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like* (Galatians 5:19-21). If some of those words are strange to you, then please take a dictionary and discover for yourself how many contemporary church members will be precluded from the Kingdom of God because they cling to these things; as Galatians 5:21 tells us, *they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God* no matter how high they jump or how loud they shout or how much they pray and prophesy in tongues.)

C Our spiritual lives are nourished by spiritual food. (Our natural lives are preserved

by ingesting proper amounts of proteins and carbohydrates, and vitamins and minerals. We make this observation in order to identify certain spiritual nutrients that are equally necessary for our spiritual health. We understand, do we not, that the Bible is our Bread of Life, and Jesus is our Living Water? So can we identify some specific things that believers should get from the Word of God, both from the example of the life and work of Jesus, and from its written form? For example, God created us all with needs for love, acceptance, respect, and appreciation. Where, then, should believers go to have our cravings for these satisfied? We daresay that as believers, as Brothers and Sisters in the family of God and as members one of another in the Body of Christ, we have a moral responsibility to love and honor one another. For this, the Bible tells us to *rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep* (Romans 12:15). If we cannot do these things for one another then all our pretensions about spiritual gifts and miraculous signs are as phony as the tricks of the Egyptian sorcerers. Where, then, does our ability to love one another enough to forgive each other 70 times 7 times come from? Where does the believer find enough grace for the charity required in *to him that asketh thee, give, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away* (Matthew 5:42)? And where do we find humility to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and minister to those who are sick (with AIDS) or imprisoned (for their faith, in Burma or China)— as we are inspired to do by Matthew 25? We get these from our study of the Bible and our emulation of the behavior of Jesus. If we were to re-read the part about being predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ with these thoughts in mind, we would soon know by the holiness (or selfishness) of our words, deeds, and attitudes who is and who is not a blood-bought, born-again, Bible-believing Child of God: in other words, our words and deeds and attitudes would be the signs of the miracle of the new birth in our lives, or of our own need to be saved despite our pretensions.)

V Without the evidence of godliness, contemporary miracle-workers and sign-makers might as well be Egyptian sorcerers. (They will accomplish just as much good for the

Kingdom of God as Pharaoh's magicians did for the Children of Israel. For those who may not have heard, or may have forgotten, holiness is our emulation of the character of God; righteousness is our imitation of the behavior of Christ; and just to be thorough, godly is an adverb that describes how one lives, if holiness and righteousness are present in his or her life. Titus 2:12 tells us, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.* Let us make our words and deeds and attitudes the signs, or the evidence, of our godliness; and we must add quickly, that our humility will preclude boasting about our own holiness, but only if we have learned humility from the example of Jesus. Our integrity will be a self-evident truth; and as Psalm 25:21 suggests, integrity and uprightness will protect us from evil; specifically, the twin evils of hypocrisy and pretension, on one side, and of suspicions engendered by gossips and rumors, on the other. When the signs we observe are mere copies of the real thing, and tricks we see are just counterfeits of God's miracles, we need not worry that pretenders might damage us.)

A Humanism seeks to glorify individual people, not God. (This is the true reason behind the pretension and the hypocrisy. Pretender seek recognition and acclamation, from people. The Spirit of God has no need for circus side-shows and night club acts masquerading as "worship dance". In the end, *every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess* (Romans 14:11) —even Egyptian magicians, contemporary hypocrites, and every other variety of pretender who attempts to replace the glory of God with his or her own humanistic counterfeits of God's Power.)

B We have two signs of our Covenant with God in Christ. (As we said, there were two in the Old Testament, and there are two in the New Testament. Every born-again child of God should be baptized, as a sign to himself and everyone else that he was in fact born again, *of water and of spirit*, in Christ's words (John 3:5). Then as Jesus shared the Last Supper with His Disciples, He told them that the cup of wine was the New Testament in His Blood, and that they should drink it in remembrance of Him. So

Jesus ordained two signs for believers, and we need not go off on some denominational tangent looking for something else: for to do so risks falling into sorcery and witchcraft ourselves. God's Power will remain intact and undiminished, even if it is counterfeited by Satan. God will perform His Promises in your life and mine, because He is God and part of His Divine character is the integrity to do what He says He will do. And finally, let us remember that signs are only signs, they are not the reality of what they signify. God put His Almighty Power at the disposal of Moses specifically to demonstrate that power to the Hebrews, and to Pharaoh. Moses used that power properly and thereby accomplished the Will of God. We, too, have the Power of God at our disposal. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is **the power of God*** (I Corinthians 1:18). Then let us who are saved use the power of God properly and accomplish His Will in our lives and in the lives of others, and not confuse the issue for those for whom Christ died by pointing them to signs and miracles instead of to Jesus. The first miracle they or anyone else needs to experience is the miracle of the regeneration, which can only be accomplished by our preaching the Gospel of Salvation by Grace through faith in Jesus, to everyone and at every time we have an opportunity to do so.)