

## Signs and Wonders and Speaking for God (Exodus 3:19-4:9)

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In the book of Exodus we've seen in ch 3 the burning bush God who says 'I AM WHO I AM.' We saw a week ago *I am* means independent, eternally existent, self-sufficient covenant keeper. 6 days ago many millions saw and heard at the funeral of the Queen 'I Am' applied to Jesus, quoting when our Lord said I Am 'the resurrection and the life and whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall not die eternally.'

That quote was part of the internationally televised prayer. It went on, next line: 'We meekly beseech Thee O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him [the savior] as our hope...and receive that blessing, which Thy well beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee... Grant this we beseech Thee, O Merciful Father through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray the new King Charles and many around the world will truly believe in Jesus the *I am*. That's who the book of Exodus is ultimately about, God's people need a redeemer, a mediator. At the end of Ex 2, the ruler of Egypt died, and Israel grieved in a different way under the evil rule of slavery. Undoubtedly it was an impressive State funeral and burial maybe in a pyramid. Today in Ex 3 the High King of heaven has a speech for the new king of Egypt and its kingdom

Look at Ex 3:8, God says '*I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians...*' **HAND** becomes a key phrase in the Exodus. 'Ancient Egyptian texts characteristically describe the power of Pharaoh in terms of his strong hand ... and the one who destroys enemies with his arm.'<sup>2</sup> In this historical context, the Pharaoh was "endlessly entitled 'Lord of the strong arm' ... the early fifteenth-century Pharaoh Thutmose II (1492–1479 BC) [the one Moses may have known growing up, that Pharaoh in particular was] described as the 'Great of Power, Mighty of Arm.'<sup>3</sup>

That's the background to Exodus and after the plagues and red sea crossing Israel sees and sings '*in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy...because of the greatness of your arm ...*'<sup>4</sup> The one true God alone is Lord with a strong arm. At Passover, Jews celebrated and said to their sons who asked what it all meant: '*with a strong hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt...*'<sup>5</sup>

That's the setting. Pharaoh is no deity, has no sovereignty and isn't truly mighty. God will win hands down. **3:19:** *But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.* <sup>20</sup> *So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.* <sup>21</sup> *And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty,* <sup>22</sup> *but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."*

<sup>1</sup> *Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD [Yahweh] did not appear to you.' "* <sup>2</sup> *The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."* <sup>3</sup> *And he said, "Throw it on the ground."* *So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it.* <sup>4</sup> *But the LORD said to Moses, "Put out*

*your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—*<sup>5</sup> *“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”*<sup>6</sup> *Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.*<sup>7</sup> *Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh [healing power].*<sup>8</sup> *“If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.”*<sup>9</sup> *If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”*

**HAND-God has the upper hand and delivers from Egypt's hand using the hand of Moses**

Have you ever heard someone say ‘God told me...’? How do you know who speaks for God? Moses didn’t expect them to trust him or just to take his word for it that he had seen God and heard His Word. Does God speak today as He did to Moses? If so, should we take someone’s word for it or trust them? Can we expect instant healing today like v. 6 (leprous, 1 second later not)? Many today claim to be miracle-workers or healers or say God spoke to them or appeared to them. You can see on Christian TV, TBN, alleged signs and wonders and supposed prophets who say we can expect wealth and prosperity just like Israel got from Egypt at the end of ch 3.

**Some even try to handle snakes by the tail like Moses and doesn't always go well**

But we need to see what God was actually doing in Bible times, His true work and counterfeits. Moses expects God’s people to be skeptical in v. 1. How will Israel believe he actually had God appear and really heard God’s Word for them? If a scraggly stranger came to church and told our elders ‘I was talking to a burning bush the other day and He told me what you must do...’ I’d rightly be suspicious if the desert heat got to him, or if he was dehydrated or is delusional! Israel wonders, so God did wonders by Moses’ hand, so Moses’ hand can later write scripture.

- Outline:**
- 1. The uniqueness of God speaking and miracle-workers**
  - 2. The purpose of signs and wonders in Bible times**
  - 3. The witness of Christ’s sufficient word for us today**

First, we need to see it’s unique the way God speaks in the Bible before His Word was written. It was never a normal occurrence for believers to hear God speak. The millions of Israelites in Egypt didn’t hear from God, but Moses is being uniquely called to be God’s spokesman to His people and to later write it down. From what we can tell in the text it had been 400+ years since anyone heard God speak until the burning bush. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had heard, but 2500+ years since Adam’s family, God rarely spoke even to His patriarchs. And normally they orally passed down what God had said to other believers who never heard God audibly.

When God did speak it was unique and not the same as those who say ‘God told me’ today. Gen 22 ‘Abraham, sacrifice your son...’ No question God said it and he was to obey it, but today we hear people say God said things we may question, or may be better called ‘strong impressions.’ Imagine you’re working in your yard and doing a burn-pile, what if you saw a rattlesnake that you ran away from and a voice from the fire said ‘come back, grab it by the tail...’ would you? Should you? That’s what the Lord said in v. 4 and Moses instantly obeyed. If a guy today says ‘the Lord said,’ is he confident it’s the same thing as in the Bible to risk his life or his son’s for?

It's not the same thing as v. 4 *'the LORD said,'* so let's not say *'the Lord said'* like in the Bible. To say today *'the Lord said to me'* demeans what the Bible means in v. 4 and it's dangerous. They keep using that phrase *'God told me,'* but I don't think it means what they think it means. Listen to what the Lord said through this same Moses in Dt 4: *'You shall not add to the word that I command you...Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire...and still live?'* (v. 2, 33). Point: it's incredibly unique to hear God speak and still live!

**In Ex 20 at Mt. Sinai Israel hears and fears. If you really heard that voice, you'd fear and fall!**

Moses understood it's one of the most serious things to claim God a word from the Lord or to say God said something like prophets did in Bible times. Moses wrote in Dt 18:20 the one *'who presumes to speak a word in my name that [God has] not commanded him to speak...shall die.'* If you're not sure enough to die if you're wrong, don't call it a word from God. Don't presume to tell others. Some people say *'God is talking to me'* or *'He's speaking'* but they mean *'leading or convicting me by His Spirit.'* There can be specific sin He reveals in you or exact person He guides you to witness to. PTL and say that or *'I feel convicted'* or *'I feel led'* or *'I sense maybe'* ...but a *'thus says the Lord,'* or *'God told me'* was for prophets and God's spokesmen to others.

**Instead of 'speaking,' better to call it God 'leading' or 'calling' to apply His Word, and test it**

Ezekiel 13:6 says *"They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them... you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have uttered falsehood...I am against you, declares the Lord GOD."* Rev 22 ends with a warning not to add to the words of the book or God will add plagues on you like Egypt. That's not just for prophecy or the law, Pr 30:6 *'Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you'*<sup>6</sup>

**STORY – young girl who said God said to break up, so poor guy dumped by her and God!**

Voddie Baucham said<sup>7</sup> if you're talking about *'God talking to me'* and it's not Bible, *'Please stop being flippant about that phrase. Please stop using that phrase ['God said/spoke/told me'] because it belittles what God did to Moses...God spoke to Moses. He may move me. He may... use people to speak into my life but He doesn't do what He did here. If He does, then our Bibles should not be leather-bound, we should have them in a 3-ring binder so that we can continue to add the new [revelation] of God. Because if He's speaking to me like He's speaking to Moses it bears the same authority. We need to be careful with that phrase...God's speech here is unique.'*

It's also unique in history to see miracles like Ex 4. The word *'miracle'* is used for the first time in Bible history in this text (4:21 ESV). Since creation God primarily worked by providence. A miracle is God acting in a way that defies natural laws or causes (like instant physical visible healing of Moses' hand). Or changing molecular structure of a staff -> serpent, water -> blood.

True miracles like that are very rare. Sproul writes in Moses and The Burning Bush: *'We have a tendency to read the Bible as if miracles were occurring every other day, to everyone in history. Actually, a close look at the appearance of miracles in the Bible reveals that they're clustered. There were miracles that attended Moses in his mediator[spokesman] office, but then very little miraculous activity took place for centuries. The next redemptive-historical period that had a cluster of miracles was with Elijah [and couple other prophets]...After that, we don't read about miracles...of the Old Testament, until a blaze of miracles attended the appearance of Jesus.'*<sup>8</sup>

**400 'silent years' (no new message or miracles) before Messiah and before Moses**

God miraculously saved by His own hand at times (Daniel in lion's den, friends in fire), but Moses is the first and one of a few miracle-workers given powers to perform by human hand.

**4:17** *And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs... <sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power [literally 'your hand', this is a miraculous power or gift given to man].*

God can and does miracles as He wills then or now, but Moses is the first **miracle-worker** God gives miraculous gifts to as he gives His message to others (and he'll be 1st writer of scripture). If you took a timeline of 6000+ years of history, there's 3-4 blips of miracle-workers 50-100 yrs

- Moses in his final 30-40 years & Joshua
- Elijah & Elisha (prophets)
- Jesus & the Apostles (30s-50s/60s AD)

*Over 90% of miracles in only 100-some years of biblical history*

**Which takes us from the uniqueness to #2. the purpose of signs and wonders in Bible times**

- Primary: Confirming for believers who spoke and wrote God's word
- Secondary: Warning judgment on unbelievers while offering deliverance
  - o This 2<sup>nd</sup> one you can see if you look at 3:20: <sup>20</sup> *So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.*
  - o Elijah and prophets also did miracles before judgment fell on Israel in their lifetime
  - o Jesus' miracles were rejected by Jewish leaders and promised judgment in 70 AD
  - o But He and apostles and prophets also brought miraculous deliverance to the elect
  - o Ex 4:9 water to blood is a sign of judgment, deliverance to come by blood in ch 12
  - o In v. 6-7 God giving a disease then delivering from it also previews the plagues
  - o In v. 2-5 the staff was used to deliver Israel, the serpent is deadly power on Egypt

*Signs often gave physical deliverance and pointed to spiritual salvation*

We'll see the 2<sup>nd</sup> purpose more in chapters 5-14 but the 1<sup>st</sup> is primarily in Moses' mind in ch 4. This is the first mention of 'signs' and 'wonders' in scripture. 3:20 mentions 'wonders' and in 4:8-9 God gives miraculous 'signs' to show Israel and Egypt. Why were miracle-workers given those 3 time periods, Moses, prophets, 1<sup>st</sup> century? To show who spoke and wrote God's Word.

*The rare times we see miracle-workers is before new revelation in scripture*

In Bible history we don't see miracle-workers when God's message isn't going forth and going to be written by proven spokesmen. Look at Ex 4:1, Moses is concerned they won't believe him so God gives him a sign, v. 5 says so they'll believe the Lord God came and gave His message. Signs and wonders gave legitimacy and validity for God's ambassadors and authors of scripture

- If you show up in a foreign country and claim to be an ambassador of another kingdom, you'll need credentials for credibility (heavenly power backed Moses, prophets, apostles)
- If you want millions to follow you to a desert, 'I heard from a talking bush' isn't enough

*God gives 3 signs, maybe because everything is established by 2-3 witnesses*

If you look at v. 31, Moses with Aaron show and tell to Israel, show the wonders and tell the words of God. End of v. 31 *'He also performed the signs before the people and they believed...'*

- **Elijah** healed the widow's son, *'And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24)*
- **Jesus** turned water into wine in Jn 2, then Jn 3:2 *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*
- Acts 2:22: *'Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know...'* (NIV)

- **Apostles:** *many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles... they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall...they were all healed.* Acts 5
- That was physical deliverance for all, no one has that miraculous gift since then to walk through hospital beds and heal by your shadow (or later by a handkerchief you touched)
- God can heal and do miracles but there's no miracle-workers or healers like that since
- The purpose wasn't just to heal all Jerusalem, it was so they could see the apostles had been with Jesus (4:13-16) and by His power spoke His Word and later wrote His word
- Acts 14:3 says Paul and his associates came *'speaking...for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.'*
- The Corinthians questioned Paul's credentials to speak but he said 2 Cor 12:12 *'The signs of a true apostle were performed among you...with signs and wonders and mighty works'*

*So he writes NT letters credibly, 'Paul an apostle of Christ...'*

Moses, the prophets, and apostles spoke and wrote God's Word and were validated by miracles. The signs of Moses came before scriptures (1<sup>st</sup> half of OT) and Elijah before prophets (2<sup>nd</sup> half), and the signs of Jesus and the apostles came before the final NT scriptures in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The OT is summed up as *'the Law/Moses and the prophets'* and Eph 2:20 says the NT church is *'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.'* A foundation is only laid once, that was completed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, not to be repeated 20 later, a foundation on a building's 20<sup>th</sup> story. Eph 2:20 says the apostles and prophets were the foundation and Christ is the chief cornerstone.

*That foundation is done once for all, because Christ is sufficient and so is His Word*

**Which takes us to 3rdly and finally: The witness of Christ's sufficient word for us today**  
**GCBC What We Teach:** *'We believe the gift of apostle or prophet (Eph 4:8, 11) and related revelatory miraculous gifts (1 Cor 12:1, 28-31) were uniquely for the founding of the NT church (Eph 2:20) and to attest God's spoken word (Heb 2:3-4; Acts 5:12-21; 2 Cor 12:12) before the completion of Christ's sufficient final written Word, which warns against new revelation or extra-biblical prophecies (Rev 22:18-21; Heb 1:1-2; 2 Pet 1:16-2:3; Prov 30:6).'*

*We sang: 'Your Word alone is solid ground, the mighty rock on which we build'*

True apostles did signs and saw Christ and with Him completed the once-for-all foundation for the church. The firm foundation for saints of the Lord is laid for our faith in His excellent word. Ex 4 ultimately points forward to Christ who has power to transform, power over the serpent, power to heal leprosy instantly or a withered hand. It's His power that can turn water to another substance (wine or blood) and there's wonder-working power in His blood to turn us from sin.

*Turn to Heb 1*

Will signs revive at the end? Mt 24:24 warns of signs and wonders by false prophets at the end. Should we seek signs today? Jesus already answered that question in Mt 12:39: *He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! (NIV). Paul says 'Jews demand signs...but we preach Christ crucified...Christ the power of God' (1 Cor 1:22-24). Do we need miracles today so men will believe? O of I could raise the dead like Elijah or Paul? Jesus told a story where one said 'if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But Jesus said 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ... If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead' (Lk 16).*

*Jesus rose, and Jewish leaders rejected*

Heb 1:1 *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... [God's last word, how God speaks now]*

In the past God spoke by prophets but now decisively and finally He has spoken to us by Jesus. We don't need any revelation after the final NT book, which is 'the Revelation of Jesus Christ.' His Word is sufficient and His work is sufficient to save you if you see you're a sinner and turn from your sin and trust His death for it and resurrection, and you'll see a miracle: your new life!

2:3 *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* Notice the Lord first declared this salvation, then it was attested by us who heard Jesus (apostles and those close to them), and God bore witness by signs and wonders. Past tense, pre-70 A.D. Hebrews was written before 70 A.D. and speaks already of the age of miracles in the past tense.

**Flip forward a few pages to 2 Peter to hear the apostle Peter**

Mt. of Transfiguration with Moses, Elijah, Jesus -> they vanish, '*this is my Son, listen to Him*' The 3 miracle-worker eras all come together, the Law and Prophets before the apostles and God basically tells Peter stop talking and makes Moses and Elijah disappear and says listen to Jesus. He's the full final revelation of God who completes all we need in the sufficient word of Christ.

Look at 2 Peter 1:17, and Peter talks about one of the few times He heard a voice from heaven. Middle of v. 17: *...the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup> And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place...*

Peter's saying don't seek an experience like that, see that you have something more certain in the Word of God. There's a more sure voice when you open the prophetic word, the scriptures. v. 3: *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness [another translation 'we have everything we need'], through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises*

...

LET ME CLOSE WITH LYRICS OF A SONG CALLED "SIGNS" BY BEAUTIFUL EULOGY

... my life is more like the book of Ruth than Exodus, I've never seen the parting of a ocean

or a cloud by day, pillar by night

just the normal, everyday workin of life...

scratch yo temple, so deep it's simple

silly us, ignore the plain, we prefer a riddle, dying to see a miracle while holding God's diary lookin for signs

...remember that time I saw that leaf fall, I was positive it was God's call?...

sometimes what we believe to be true from our supernatural pursuits is actually a fluke,

a series of events that's used to distract you from the truth

but I'll give you a sign that's obvious

one of the most supernatural acts is that God through his Word

has actually revealed everything pertaining to life and godliness

there's this idea that an individual is somehow more spiritual

if he sees these signs and symbols and ... what's normally invisible ...

but I say the mark of a mature man is the one who reads God's Word and understands

and allows that to govern his decisions and prospective plans