

# **"The Rod of Moses"**

## **Exodus 4:1-9**

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**by C.W. Powell**

“And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.”  
(Ex 4:1-9)

So we have come this far. Israel has been in bondage. Over four hundred years have passed since God had spoken to Abraham and told him that his descendants would be captive in Egypt and slave to the Egyptians. Egypt was the most powerful and learned nation of the Mediterranean world, possessing great riches and military power, and Pharaoh reigned as the god-king over every part of the lives of the people. It was a time when the great pyramids were built to the awe and wonder of the ancient world.

But God remembers His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a promise that had been conceived in eternity before the world began, but was revealed

in the Garden of Eden, that sin would be defeated and the head of the serpent would be crushed seed of the woman. That promise had been narrowed down in Abraham, for the promise to Abraham was that it would someone from his family and nation that would overcome the kingdom of the serpent, overcome the guilt and power of sin, and bring liberty to the people of God.

As we pointed out before, these things are real historical events, they really took place, Moses wrote while that generation was still alive and had memory of these things. But they were written for our admonition; these were real, historical events, but they point to the salvation of the soul, and the triumph that is in Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection.

There were three things that God must do if His plan for Israel was to succeed. First, God must overcome the doubts and fears of Moses. Moses knew how hard the hearts of Israel were. He had set about to deliver an Israelite forty years before, and had to flee the country and had completely forty years in exile in Midian, keeping the sheep of his father-in-law. He was married and had two sons by this time. Moses said, "They will not believe me. They will mock me and turn away and say 'God has not spoken to you.'" Moses must be strengthened in his faith.

The second thing that must be done is to convince the people of Israel that God has sent Moses to deliver them. As Moses said, "they will not believe me." Many years had passed. Many generations had passed away since they had been in Egypt, and Joseph and Jacob were distant memories. Of course, they knew that the bones of Joseph had been preserved in Egypt and his words were preserved, "Carry my bones with you when you go up out of Egypt, for God will deliver you." But this was no doubt, by then, were just words that were a fading memory, crushed out by the daily tyranny and toil that was imposed upon them. Even Moses, who had such promise and such a wonderful preservation in the little basket set adrift in the Nile, rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and proved to be a disappointment. Why should they believe him after forty years of silence. Besides, old men do not lead revolutions; this is for young men in the zeal and desperation of youth. So Israel would have to be convinced.

The third thing was Pharaoh and his court. They would have to be convinced that God had sent Moses with a message for Egypt. How impressive were the Egyptian gods and how impressive was the tradition and evidences given for their power. The ancient kingdoms were but extensions of the power of

the gods, and Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, was considered the son of God, the very link between the gods in heaven and men on the earth. A large body of science and cult and myth supported their religion which was also directed by the very power of the devil, for in those days, God suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways, leaving them to wickedness and bondage which they richly deserved.

So the task was a formidable one, for this strange Jehovah, who appeared to Moses in this burning bush, far out on the backside of the desert, far from the centers of power and prestige and culture, far from the masses of the people, far from the powers and the lusts of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In order to accomplish these three things, God gave Moses three signs, and very significant they are and were. Remember, these things are written for our admonition: these are strong signs with the imprint of the very word of God upon them. They are wonders that speak and instruct us.

I. What is that in thine hand, Moses? Moses probably never even was aware that he still carried a shepherd's crook in his hand. But now he is aware.

A. At God's word, he casts it on the ground, and it became a serpent; Moses is frightened and runs from it. Then at God's word, he reaches out, takes it by the tail, and it becomes a rod again.

B. This was a powerful miracle—a sign—and Moses would not have missed the significance. Carving of ancient Egypt show those in power holding such a staff, carved in the likeness of a cobra, the symbol of their power and a threat against rebellion. Moses is being shown that the rod of God, though a shepherd's crook, will overthrow and defeat all the power that would come against Israel.

C. There is more: Moses will come before Pharaoh with the staff of a shepherd—whom the Egyptians despised. You remember that they had been settled in Goshen, away from the population of the Egyptians, because shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians. They despised and mocked Israel; but deliverance would come by that which Egypt despised. There was no attempt to find some common ground here—the difference is magnified.

D. There is even more: The serpent was a symbol of the power of guilt and fear that sin holds over people until they are set free by the

power of God. It was the serpent who tempted Eve and brought sin into the world; and Satan's kingdom enjoys its power because of guilt, for it uses the power of guilt against faith.

E. Satan was to be confronted at the very center of his power, the guilt and misery of sin. The kingdoms of this world feed off the guilt and misery of guilty people.

F. It would be a shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep who is represented by Moses, who would deliver the sheep from the lion and the bear, but taking away the guilt of sin: by confronting it directly and bearing the shame and reproach of sin. He was made sin for us, who knew not sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

G. God is showing Moses that the power of sin and death is in His hands. Jesus would appear after his resurrection to the beloved apostle John and tell him, "I have the keys of death and hell." Satan's kingdom is overthrown because guilt is overthrown. The power of the devil is tamed in the hands of the Good Shepherd, who came to save his people from their sins.

H. You must deal with the guilt question, for nothing between you and God can be settled until the guilt is settled. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. How wonderful is the deliverance from guilt that comes when we acknowledge our guilt before the Lord and know that His cross has taken all of our sins away forever. Amen and Amen.

II. But there is more: guilt brings uncleanness and pollution. So Moses is given a second sign. Put your hand into your bosom—into your heart—Moses.

A. Because of sin, man is alienated from God and thus his heart, which was created as a temple in which God would dwell, has become polluted and foul with idolatry and corruption.

B. Jesus said, it is not what enters into the man, but what comes out of the man that defiles the man. Out of the heart are the issues of life, Scripture says.

C. Leprosy in ancient times was considered a pollution that made men unfit to dwell with others. It is called Hansen's disease nowadays and responds to treatment, and it almost completely unknown in the developed countries, But it was a horror in the ancient world. Later in the law of God, lepers were required to live by themselves, completely quarantined from other humans, and cry "unclean, unclean," when people approached. The contraction of the disease and the cure of the disease was considered a direct act of God and a curse.

D. God is telling Moses that not only is the guilt of sin in the hands of the shepherd, but also the pollution of sin is in His power. God will provide for the cleansing of His people, and Moses will teach them the ceremonies and rituals that will point to Christ. Full revelation will come later, but even leprosy, that most foul uncleanness, is under the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

E. "What God hath cleansed man must not call unclean." As Saul, that foul Pharisee polluted with many sins and corruption was told by Ananias, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord." Baptism is a symbol in the New Testament of the cleansing from sin that the Holy Spirit does at the command of Jesus Christ. Questions 72 and 73 of the catechism state:

Q72: Is, then, the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sins?

A72: No, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin.

Q73: Why then does the Holy Ghost call Baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?

A73: God speaks thus with great cause, namely, not only to teach us thereby that just as the filthiness of the body is taken away by water, so our sins are taken away by the blood and Spirit of Christ; but much more, that by this divine pledge and token He may assure us that we are as really washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water.

III. There was a third sign: if they do not believe, take water from the Nile and pour it on the ground, and it will become blood.

A. There were so many advantages that Egypt enjoyed from the Nile River. Protection; fertile land, water.

B. The Nile was worshiped by the Egyptians. It was the source of their life.

C. Marvelous is the power of God. Jesus could turn water into wine—our life into joy and happiness, making us new creatures in Christ Jesus; or He can turn our lives into the bitterness of pollution and corruption, into blood.

D. Jesus poured out his own life as His blood was shed and poured from the cross from that body that was broken for us. From that shed blood comes life unto life as guilt is removed and our sins forgiven; but for those who turn away, it becomes a curse and condemnation. Therefore Paul could say that the Gospel is life unto life and death unto death, because it comes with authority.

E. Christ has authority over the very source and quality of your life.

Amen and Amen  
God bless you.