

## Moses's Authentic Ministry

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Exodus: Redeemer and Redeemed / Exodus 4

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***God's signs (wonders) provoke reverence or rejection--important authenticating testimony of God's Word. They reveal the condition of the heart within.***

Our passage today is the entire fourth chapter, which is one unit organized around the idea of “signs and miracles.”

Chapter Four is divided into two major scenes with two parts in each scene.

1. Scene One: Still at the Burning Bush
  - a. Moses to Yahweh: “They Won’t Believe.” Yahweh gives signs to prove.
  - b. Moses to Yahweh: “I Can’t Talk.” Yahweh gives a mouthpiece
2. Scene Two: Back to Egypt
  - a. Moses identifies with the people of God.
  - b. The people of God hear Moses and Aaron.

### **The Signs to Convince the Hebrews (4:1-9)**

In 4:1, we see that Moses is afraid people will not believe him—that God has visited him. So, God gives him three signs to show the Hebrew people, and he even allows Moses to practice before he gets in front of the people.

God gives Moses three signs to prove that God has commissioned him for this task.

#### **Sign One: The Staff**

Commentators suggest that this sign highlights how God can take ordinary things which are lying around, such as Moses’s shepherding staff, to make extraordinary demonstrations of his power.

**Why a snake?** The text does not explicitly tell us, but there are at least two interrelated possibilities.

1. One commentator noted that serpents were revered in the ANE as symbols of wisdom and fertility. In Egypt, they were revered. (Durham, 44) Another noted that the serpent was *the* symbol of Egyptian royal authority: it was the feature on Pharaoh’s headdress.

So, Moses handling a serpent without being bitten is a sign that the things Pharaoh ought to control are actually under submission to Yahweh. (Enns, 109)

2. Finally, we'd be remiss to ignore the protoevangelion that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Moses's mastery over a snake prefigures the work of Christ to disarm the evil powers and his future work of destroying the Ancient Serpent in the last days.

This is certainly a sign for the Hebrews: God's sign subverts the symbols Egypt so that they can trust Moses as a faithful shepherd.

### **Sign Two: The Hand**

In 4:6-7, Moses is told to put his hand in a cloak. When he pulled it out, it would be covered in leprosy. When he placed his hand back in, his hand would return clean.

**Why a skin disease?** Again, we are not told explicitly why, but knowing a bit of biblical backgrounds is significant. The Hebrews (and all others for that matter) would have been horrified by a leprous infection. This sign would show the people that Yahweh could make clean things unclean and then clean again.

### **Sign Three: The River**

While the first two signs were something which Moses himself could perform, this last one would leave no doubt that Moses was not like magicians of Pharaoh who imitate the signs with illusion in Exodus 7.

Moses would pour water from the Nile on the ground and it would turn into blood.

### **Why water to blood?**

Similar to above, these are extraordinary, authenticating signs that Moses is authorized to speak on behalf of God. Each week, I've reminded you that the Nile River is a god personified as Hapi which gave life. To have the life line of Egypt, this river in a desert land turn to blood shows God's authority over not just the Egyptian crown (snake); clean and unclean (hand); but unrivaled command over all things (the supposed domain of the Egyptian pantheon).

### **What is the purpose of these signs?**

Each of these signs testified that Moses was the leader authorized by the Lord.

Throughout history, God has given *signs* as markers that what he has said will happen or to testify to the trustworthiness of someone speaking on his behalf.

Here are a few examples:

- Genesis 1:14 "And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for **signs** and for seasons, and for days and years"

- Genesis 4:15 “Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord put a **mark** on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.”
- Genesis 9:12–13 “12 And God said, “This is the **sign** of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a **sign** of the covenant between me and the earth.”
- Genesis 17:11 “11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a **sign** of the covenant between me and you.”

And all of our moments here in Exodus and the rest of the Book of Moses.

Just a bit later, in 4:21, we see Yahweh discuss the **miracles (Gk. wonders)** he will do in front of Pharaoh which will not move his heart. Similar to **signs** these are acts which God uses to authenticate the trustworthiness of his Word.

There is an interesting play between the book of Exodus here and in the New Testament.

Through the ministry of Jesus he gives many **signs** that he has divine authority and can be trusted that he is not merely speaking the true Word of God but is also the very Word of God.

In John alone, there are at least 17 times where **signs** are an important authenticating feature of Jesus’s ministry.

But the place where an overwhelming amount of **signs** and **wonders** appears is in the book of Acts in the ministry of Peter, and the earliest ministry of Paul and Barnabas, with a sharp drop off in Acts 15.

I think here in are some clues which can help us understand why God gave signs to Moses and Peter, Paul, and Barnabas (but later ceased to performs **signs and wonders** even though God supernaturally intervened via their prayers.)

- The signs and wonders authenticated the apostolic message and ministry among people who needed an authenticating sign that they were indeed speaking the announcements of God.
- Just as there were two signs given to Moses which authenticated him and one sign which demonstrated God’s power over life and death in Exodus, this phrase **signs and wonders** which authenticate the apostolic ministry ceases after Acts 15. Every other miraculous work that occurs happens not because they do a **sign and wonder** but because they pray. Even when Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, it is because he lays himself on top of the boy, just like Samuel did in 1 Kings 17 where he prayed three times for the boy to live. Luke doesn’t tell us Paul prays, but he also does not call it a **sign** or **wonder**.
- The **sign** and **wonder** tell us a great deal about the conditions of the human heart. God gives the signs to the timid Hebrews so they will not fear Pharaoh’s sword when they walk

out of Egypt. But Jesus condemns the hardness of the Jews' heart towards in an incredible recall to Exodus 4 in Matthew 12.

Remember Matthew tells us that Jesus encounters a man with a “withered” hand at the synagogue. Jesus heals the hand to show how it does not violate the Sabbath to do mercy, and then just a bit later, they demand what from him?

Matthew 12:38 “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” The very sign given to Moses, the healing of a hand, was insufficient testimony to them. They reveal the true condition of their heart.

The longing for authenticating **signs and wonders** should be no surprise for us, again, because we are glory seekers. And we shouldn't be surprised when false prophets and teachers abuse the idea of sign to authenticate their own words, pretending to be prophets who speak on behalf of God today. We'll encounter this in Exodus 7, where the magicians practice a “secret art.”

Should we expect signs today to authenticate ministry?

I do not believe that today we should look for signs to authenticate ministry? I think not.

### **Why? We have the Scriptures.**

Can I suggest to you that Abraham's word to the rich man in Luke 16 should tell us something about the power of the Word of God compared to miraculous signs?

Luke 16:27–31 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father’s house—<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’<sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’<sup>30</sup> And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’<sup>31</sup> He said to him, ‘*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*’ ”

Jesus's report here clearly teaches that the Scriptures will have more converting potential than an incredible sign.

This is the virtue of the Bereans: who eagerly hear what God was up to but “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

### **Authentic ministry conforms to and communicates clearly the work of God from the unchanging Word of God.**

#### **Moses Still Needs Convincing of His Own Authority(4:10-17)**

We ought to be careful to not be like Moses here and suggest that our lack of desire comes from a lack of gifting or interest. In my experience, we actually tend to have in us the same

things as Moses: we just don't want to be the ones to do it. Exodus 4:13 "But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."

### **Pharaoh Will Not Be Convinced By Moses(4:18-23)**

Now we have a location change, and Moses has left the wilderness to return to his wife's family, and he tells Jethro he will return to "his people" Egypt.

Moses contents himself that the Word of God will do its work among his people.

### **"The Bloody Bridegroom" (4:24-26)**

What seems clear here is that Moses is about to return to his people but has not led his family in staying true to his identity: his son with Zipporah is not circumcised.

Zipporah, here, takes it upon herself to right what Moses had neglected and sees to it that her son has the covenant sign of her husband's faith.

Victor Hamilton noted that some modern evangelical commentators paint Zipporah as a villain, but I take a sympathetic approach to Zipporah here and see her as a foreshadow and anticipation of other women in Scripture whose action is a mark against men who fail to lead. Think of heroine Deborah who call Barak to obey what God told him to do. And the marriage language anticipates Ruth, a Moabite whose descends from a line related to Zipporah's Midian line. Ruth acts in faith to align herself with the people of God. I think Zipporah does the same here, and mediates on behalf of her husband, saving him from Yahweh's wrath.

### **The Hebrews Believe Moses**

The chapter closes with Moses and Aaron reunited, and then Moses and Aaron united with the people of God, believing. Exodus 4:30-31

#### **Exodus 4:30-31 ESV**

<sup>30</sup> Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. <sup>31</sup> And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

When Paul writes in Romans, he does not write that the unbelievers need signs and wonders. Instead, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways do the signs given to Moses (the staff, the hand, the river) speak to God's power and authority? How do you interpret the role of signs and wonders in today's context? Should we expect or look for such signs in our own lives?
2. Have you ever felt like Moses, asking God to send someone else instead of you for a task or mission? Share your experience. Discuss how God's response to Moses' reluctance

(providing Aaron as a mouthpiece) shows His understanding and patience. How does this resonate with your personal experiences?

3. The sermon suggests a preference for Scripture over miraculous signs for authenticating God's message. How does this perspective align with your understanding and experience? Discuss the importance of Scripture in understanding and strengthening your faith, especially in times of doubt or confusion.
4. Reflect on how God's patience and mercy, as seen in His interactions with Moses, have been evident in your life. Share a time when you felt God's patience in your spiritual growth or while overcoming a challenge.