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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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BIBLE MIRACLES

BY ROWLAND H. C. HILL

Part 2

The wonders in the land of Ham were performed in three series of three each. There was an increase in the severity of the successive threes and in each case the third miracle was the most severe.

Egypt's magicians tried to imitate the first three. They were silent and helpless during the second three judgments, as well as themselves afflicted. But the folly of Jannes and Jambres, "men of corrupt minds and rejected as regards their faith", must have their folly made plain to all (2 Tim. 3:9).

After all this, due warning and opportunity was given for repentance before the next series of three began, for human life was now at stake. While Pharaoh remained adamant some of his people showed the effect of the previous plagues and "feared the word of Jehovah" (Exodus 9:20). Accordingly they got their cattle to shelter before the unprecedented storm burst upon them. During the tempest fire and hail were mingled till there was no escape for man or beast in the field. In this judgment Isis and Osiris are singled out the second time, for they were regarded as supreme deities, even as two judgments had fallen on the Nile River, another supreme deity. Did or could these deities, supposedly in control of the elements, do anything? All nature was proclaiming by the crash of thunder, pelting hail, devouring lightning bolts and fierce tempest that Jehovah controlled them all. Israelites, observing the distant storm and knowing of its havoc were made to realize that the earth and all that therein is, belongeth to Jehovah.

Locusts came next. Even by idolaters these were considered as a special visitation from God. As Moses stretched out his hand over the cherished land the wind commenced to blow and steadily, ominously, it blew all the night. Hearing it the people awaited with dread the coming hordes of locusts that would destroy all remaining green things and leave the eggs for future visitations. In the morning they arrived. No such locusts and no such numbers had been known ever before. Where was Serapis, protector from such hordes? Was it any use invoking that impotent deity? Serapis, like the rest, was a nonentity. Even Pharaoh confessed his sin to escape "this death". The miracle was reversed. A west

wind took them away and there was not one to be found in Egypt, but with the departing locusts vanished Pharaoh's repentance. His priests would try and convince him that it was a natural calamity and not the direct act of Jehovah.

After this the heavens once again proclaim Jehovah as the Ruler in that sphere, for at His bidding the sun veils itself. As Moses raised his hand toward heaven, thick darkness settled down. Not the darkness of a dust storm, such can be bad enough, but this was a pall of death over the whole land. Yet there was light in the dwellings of the Israelites. God was cherishing His people and giving them light while Pharaoh (described on sculptures as "cherished by the Sun") is now abandoned by that sun he worshipped. Like King, like people, for three days with no sunshine they cowered where they were in a land of darkness and the shadow of death, tormented by every sound, plagued by hunger and waiting in terror for the unknown peril that might be walking in the thick darkness. Enforced meditation on the obduracy of their Ruler and the impotence of their multitude of gods was their portion. In neither was there a ray of hope, for the worst had already been predicted—the death of the first-born.

In the death of the first-born, animals were not exempted. Jehovah had said: "Against all the gods of Egypt will I execute judgment; I am JEHOVAH." (Exod. 12:12; Numb. 33:4).

In this detail there is notable evidence that Exodus was written at a date contemporary with Moses and not in Palestine hundreds of years later. It had been pointed out that as living animals were worshipped and thus were "gods" and suffered the death of their firstborn, the writer of Exodus mentioned a circumstance that only would be familiar to a writer in Egypt. There is no record of the worship of living animals in Canaan, and a later writer in that land would never have included animals in this last judgment.

There is a further point that provides evidence for the account in Exodus being written at the time it is stated to have been written and by Moses.

All the miracles were greatly intensified calamities such as might naturally occur in Egypt and not in Canaan, while each, as we have seen, had its undeniable *miraculous* character. This argues for a contemporary account and is significant in this: that as the miracles were performed publicly, and usually after a public prediction of their advent, and were witnessed by great numbers of people, the miracles must be true if written at (or even a

generation after) the time they happened. For this reason those who attempt to deny them try to date the record hundreds of years after they were performed. But it was a literate age when Moses lived and wrote, though earlier opponents of the truth did not know what is now well-known about that age, and the record was written at or near the time. To say there was mistake or fraud in the record is out of the question if they were thus recorded.

The culminating miracle of this series was the Red Sea crossing. Much ingenuity has been shown in endeavours to locate the crossing of the Israelites where the waters occasionally leave a shallow arm of the gulf and permit waders to cross. Three considerations may assure us that though caused by a strong gale the whole event was miraculous and proved that God was speaking to Moses in commanding them to go forward. The first consideration is found in the clear statement of the record. The miracle took place when Moses stretched his hand over the sea. The waters are said to have divided. In Psalm 136:13 it is said God "divided the Red Sea in parts." They formed a wall on the right hand and on the left hand of the marching host. This is contrary to the law of fluids. God could have made walls of ice. The floor of the sea became "dry land." Twice the dry land is referred to in the account and twice the walls of water are referred to. When Moses stretched out his hand the waters returned. All is miracle including the action and effect of the Pillar of Fire and Cloud.

The second consideration that is opposed to a partial retreating of a part of the sea by a low tide that would not be miraculous is that, in the Scriptures God constantly reminds the people that He has a claim upon them because of what He did for them at the Red Sea. See Deut. 11:4; Josh. 4:23; Neh. 9:11; Psalm 66:6, 7; Psalm 78:52, 53; Psalm 106:9, 22; Psalm 136:13-15; Isaiah 51:10; Hab. 3:8-10; Acts 7:36; Heb. 11:29. All those references during the history of Israel are not reminding them of a myth nor of a mere phenomenon of nature.

Third: the effect caused by the miracle. "They feared Jehovah, and they believed in Jehovah and in His servant Moses." They had believed before up to a point. They even had believed to the point of starting out from Egypt under Moses' leadership. Now, "by faith they passed through the Red Sea." The miracle greatly strengthened and confirmed the faith they had. They feared

Jehovah, and also His servant who had been so amazingly accredited as a messenger from God, performing God's will in leading them out from Egypt. The departure is history. Even Egypt, though not recording on monuments so great a disaster to their Pharaoh and his armies, confirmed it by silence. Edersheim remarks that in Egyptian documents seventeen years elapsed after the death of this Pharaoh before any expedition was taken into the Peninsula of Sinai, and twenty-two years before any attempts were made to recover the power over Syria which Egypt seems to have lost.

The destruction of the Egyptian hosts is also history. Traditions of the escape of the Israelites and the destruction of the Egyptians lingered for ages among surrounding peoples as ancient writers affirm. Could anything other than miracles account for the history?

The plagues in Egypt had been directed chiefly against the gods of Egypt while they also certified Moses as sent from the Only True and Living God. This God they were called upon to obey and follow. In some degree the tendency to idolatry with which they were tainted was checked. The Song of Moses in Exodus 15, is, in its latter portions, a fine expression of confidence in the future under their God's leading based on the experiences of the past. But further instruction in the knowledge of Jehovah was needed. Accordingly, at the very time when the people were tempted to question whether or not Moses was acting and speaking at Jehovah's direction the miraculous attestation was given to him. The miracles that made this attestation also served as object lessons to instruct the people in the knowledge of their God.

The journey to Canaan was one marked by such miracles at every step of the way. The Pillar of Fire and Cloud controlling their movements constantly kept before their minds the fact of the presence of Jehovah. Spiritual lessons were taught through the miracles and they also served to teach spiritual lessons to a latter age.

One instance may suffice. At Marah (Exodus 15:23-25) the water was bitter and the people complained. It was sweetened by a tree divinely intimated by Jehovah to Moses. Associated with it was a "statute and an ordinance." In mercy God had met their needs. He could and would meet all their needs and heal the bitterness of their murmuring. Obedient trust on their part would be required. Included in the blessings would be exemption from the diseases He had put on the Egyptians (Deut. 28, 29).

Trust and obedience would insure the blessedness and their bitter hearts would become fountains of sweet water.

The flight of quails was a supernatural providence but not a miracle according to our present use of the term.

In various ways during the wilderness journey the physical needs of the people were met. What they had was made to endure, such as sandals and clothing. Their strength was sustained. Disease did not attack them. Water was produced for them. All this kept them facing the Promised Land. Space forbids treating of each. Selection is difficult but the giving of the Manna deserves consideration (chap. 16:14-35).

The Manna came from heaven and not from the juice exuding from tamarisk trees. Apart from the facts of the case, such a view as it being a natural phenomenon is impossible to those who believe that the history of these people was so arranged by God as to be typical of spiritual things (1 Cor. 10:11). God's people in the wilderness of today are not supplied by what this wilderness-wild produces but by what is not of this world.

The miraculous elements in the manna are (1) it was food. What is called manna and still found exuding from some bushes in this wilderness at certain seasons only is a drug. (2) It went bad quickly so could not be kept. The Manna was found six days a week for forty years. It was given a special quality on Friday to keep till over Saturday. If kept on other days it bred worms and stank. Another portion was preserved indefinitely in the Ark in the Tabernacle for posterity. (3) It ceased the day after the food of Canaan became available. Had the supply continued up to the present it would have been no miracle, as we define the term, but one of the observed phenomena of nature.

To deny that God "rained bread from heaven" paves the way for denying Him who claimed to be that which Manna typified—"the Bread of God which came down from heaven." In the giving of the Manna there is obvious teaching, whether Israel learned it or no, concerning a life that is lived in this world but is not sustained or supplied by that which is of this world. The life is from above and from thence alone it derives its sustenance. Also they were daily reminded that a substance that was superficially like the Manna was not Manna and had none of its properties. Thus were they fed "that He might make them know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Deut. 8:3). Man is more than physical

in his constitution, for he is also spiritual and his spiritual nature requires daily sustenance as truly as his physical nature, and that spiritual food is He who came down from heaven and is now returned to heaven and given glory.

Belief in this miracle and acceptance of its teaching would check the materialism of the day that would deny spiritual capacities to man. The very science that would assert, without authority, that miracles cannot occur would leave man with nothing more than what bread alone can sustain. Dr. Smith in *The Atomic Age and the Word of God*, has a footnote that is in turn a quotation from the *New York Times*, in which a prominent scientist points out the materialistic tendency of the conclusions of scientists. Dr. Edmund W. Sinnott, Director of the Sheffield Scientific School of Yale is thus quoted:

“Science regards a human being not as a soul which may be saved or lost, but as an exquisitely constructed physico-chemical mechanism. Let us face the fact that what the world must have is a fuller cultivation of those qualities which are best termed spiritual. . . . If spirit is suspect, as today when scientific materialism carries such authority, he is in danger of degenerating into a selfish and soulless mechanism.”

Gibbon, the author of the *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, contemptuously refers to these miracles when asserting that “the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles” and yet were less impressed by them than by the testimony of their forebears for they did not give up their idolatries. This of course is by way of denying that the miracles took place. Apart from miracle neither he nor anyone else can account for the facts as recorded in the history of these people in their obedience to Moses and Joshua. The plain statements of Scripture contradict Gibbon’s inference that the miracles failed of their supposed effect. He had to get rid of the *effect* to get rid of the miracles, but the Scripture asserts that this race of ignorant idolatrous slaves did not only serve the Lord in the wilderness period but “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that He had done for Israel.” That is taken from the record on which Gibbon bases his absurd statement. Subsequent defection from the worship of the one true God cannot be ascribed to their failure to accept the miracles as such.

The conquest and possession of Canaan took place at the command of God and the divine authority by which it was accomplished was proven by the miracles under Joshua, the Judges and Samuel up to cir. 1000 B.C.

Following this period there was another series commencing about 1017 B.C., and continuing for about one hundred and twenty-five years. In this period fourteen miracles took place chiefly centered around Elijah and served to authenticate him as sent from God to warn of the national consequences of disobedience to God's law, and to call down national judgments for that disobedience.

The ministry of Elijah was more individual; attested by miracles, his ministry may be considered as one calculated to bring the individual to repentance and faith. There were fourteen miracles in this cluster also.

The period of the history of God's people that called for the next miraculous testimony was that of the downfall of both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the exile period of the latter kingdom. The people were in dispersion and subjection, and the prospect of the great promises of God seemed unlikely if not impossible of fulfilment. The miracles served to reveal that God was standing in the shadows keeping watch upon His own, and predicted the preservation and restoration of the people in fulfilment of His eternal purposes as purposed in Christ. This latter cluster of miracles were performed from cir. 600-500 B.C. During this period kingdoms rose and fell. To the faithful remnant of His people God gave His witness, not only in His providential care of them but in miracles of such a nature as would strengthen their faith in His promises through the prophets whom He sent. Thus they were assured that God was the Living God still and His purposes would ripen and be sure of realization. Miracles such as those in the book of Jonah, and the book of Daniel, were typical of the experiences of God's people and predicted His interposition on their behalf at the appointed time as well as attesting the prophecies concerning their future history to the end.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

—*St. Paul to Timothy.*