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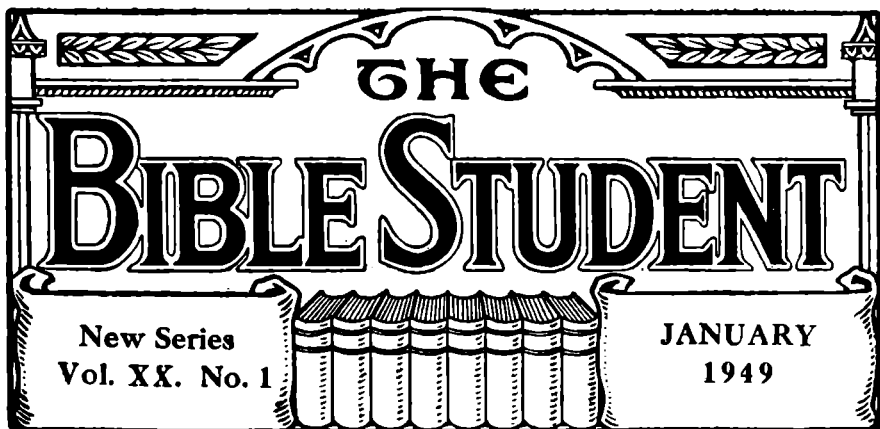
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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| THE DISCIPLE | 1 |
| THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS | 9 |
| NOTES ON HEBREWS | 15 |
| BIBLE MIRACLES | 22 |
| HE THAT IS WISE | 29 |
| DIVINE ELECTION | 36 |
| EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS | 42 |
| THE HITTITES | 46 |

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noticeable, "out of Egypt" (v. 16) "in the wilderness" (v. 17) "into His rest" (v. 18).

In *verse 16* the phrase "all they that came out of Egypt by Moses" speaks of the nation as a whole. The Apostle purposely omits reference to the few who remained faithful. The nation as a whole was guilty of provoking the Lord. The solemnity of the warning he gave in this respect is weakened by the A.V. translation. The provocation was national and involved national retribution, though all were not personally guilty.

In their disobedience Moses himself was involved, resulting in his being prohibited from entering into the land. "Even Moses on whom the Hebrews had set their hope" (John 5:45). The conclusion drawn in *verse 19*, "*And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief,*" sums up the argument thus far, and serves to introduce the warning which follows at the beginning of chapter 4. The great sin of the people of Israel was unbelief. This was responsible for their provocation of the Lord and responsible secondly for their failure to enter into the Canaan rest.

BIBLE MIRACLES

BY ROWLAND H. C. HILL

The word "miracle" is vaguely and promiscuously used. In discussing miracles we must agree as to what kind of phenomena we are talking about. In this discussion a merely supernatural event is not a miracle. All 'spiritualistic' phenomena are excluded. The acts of God in saving and sanctifying men are *not* included.

A miracle, as we shall consider miracles, is a wonder specially worked by God for a sign to man. These three elements set the bounds within which our present discussion of miracles will range.

A miracle then, is first a wonder. It excites wonder by being outside the known laws of nature and because it cannot be accounted for by those laws. Tyndall, a non-believer in the Bible but a noted scientist, is quoted as saying that if there is a God he is Almighty, and can therefore work miracles; and that miracles, if there be such a thing, have nothing to do with science, but lie outside her province.

Secondly, a miracle is a special work of God, not a familiar phenomenon, but something apparently incomprehensible.

But a miracle is *more* than a wonder worked by God. For miracles there is a special cause; they are specially worked

by God as signs to confirm a revelation. Hence a marvel is not a miracle unless there is evidence that it is specially worked by God outside the known laws of nature, for all nature is marvellous. It is not a miracle, in the sense in which we use the word, unless God points to the occurrence as a *sign* that He is speaking by man.

Let us bear in mind that the Bible miracles we shall consider have these elements, namely that they are wonders; they are special works of God; they are signs to confirm a revelation. They are the seals on a document proving it to be from God. Their value, therefore, is in the revelation they attest. A seal on a worthless rag or bit of paper has no value. A miracle is only such when it certifies to God's truth. This rules out "lying wonders" from the discussion.

What was the value of Bible Miracles?

God has so constituted the human mind that it cannot accept as a revelation from Him what is not accompanied by miracles. In full recognition of this fact all imposters pretend to work miracles as evidence that they bring a revelation from God or gods. Actual miracles, in the sense in which we use the word, attested the revelation given by God from the days of Moses, the first writer, until the Holy Scriptures were complete. They were performed by those through whom God was speaking to men.

Two things follow from this: (1) such miracles have ceased. Miracles are not being performed by God in the realm of matter in these days. (2) If unbelieving men would destroy faith in the revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures they must first destroy the belief that the recorded miracles really happened. This they are not slow to do, while at the same time encouraging their followers to believe in spirit-rapping, fortune-telling and the like.

We shall not attempt to prove that miracles happened. The Bible and Christianity are the sufficient proof. At the time they were performed they proved that God was speaking and acting. Our present purpose is to consider their suitability to the purpose for which they were worked and their effect. No attempt will be made to say whether or not they were worked by the suspension of natural laws or the introduction of higher laws, for they are inexplicable. Any attempt to explain or account for miracles or show how they could have happened is a dangerous endeavour to tone them down to where they will appear more acceptable to this so-called enlightened age.

In their ignorance unbelievers are often under the impression that the Bible is full of fabulous doings which they call myths. Neither Judiasm nor Christianity could have been founded apart from actual miracles, and even a brief consideration of the subject will reveal that there is a surprisingly *small* number of miracles recorded during the 1,500 years covered by Bible history from Moses to Christ. If the total number were spaced out evenly over that period only *one* would have happened about once in a generation. They occurred, however, in clusters with a considerable lapse of time between the clusters. Their occurrence was timely and appropriate to the purpose for which miracles were performed for they took place at most important epochs in the history of God's revelation to mankind.

The first group of miracles occurred in the days of Moses, and connected with the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. More than a merely physical deliverance was required inasmuch as these people were to be the repository of the Revelation God was to make progressively to them for the whole world. Many Israelites such as the parents of Moses, retained the knowledge and worship of the true God. Two elements contributed to the perpetuation of their faith and hope; their circumcision and the promises in the covenant it signified. At the same time, after hundreds of years of close proximity with idolatry and the efforts of their oppressors to incorporate them into the Egyptian race and religion, there were many who would be corrupted in their faith and who would recognize the gods of Egypt. It was thus necessary that, *in Egypt*, before their deliverance, there be deeply impressed on them the contrast between Egypt's impotent deities and the one whom they were to know as Jehovah. He must be recognized as the One and only Living God and the God of their fathers.

With this in mind a consideration of the miracles in Egypt will reveal their suitableness to the effect desired. The actions of the people in obeying Moses constitute the historical evidence that the miracles happened. And shall we not say that it was but mercy to Egypt to expose the folly of *their* idolatry and manifest the existence of the true and Living God?

Unbelievers have asserted that Moses did not write the Pentateuch but that the first five books of the Bible were written hundreds of years after Moses and given his name so they would be received as authoritative. In that event the miracles are inventions. Could the history recorded in those books have happened apart from

miracles performed under Moses and Joshua? The history, also confirmed by Josephus, the Jewish historian, and many others, requires that miracles were performed as we shall endeavour to indicate.

If there were no miracles how were the Israelites convinced that Moses was commissioned by God to lead them out of Egypt? The land they left at his word was a most fertile one, "the best of the land" in the words of the former friendly Pharaoh, (Gen. 47:6). In it, even though in servitude, they "ate bread to the full" (Ex. 16:3). At Moses' command they left it and engaged in wearisome marches, a succession of wars, and submitted to severe restrictions in diet, worship and regulations in everything from the matter of dress to the way they worked their cattle, etc.

Unless Moses was accredited as from God who was superior to all Egypt's boasted gods, and able to deliver them from Egypt's military might, what was it that could have induced them to follow him?

First of all Moses' faith had to be confirmed in the fact that God was sending him to perform a super-human task. An unwilling tyrant held the people in bondage and profited greatly by their labour. Merely asking would accomplish nothing; and rebellion was out of the question. Moses' faith needed to be strong and unflinching. Miracles would strengthen it. They always appeal to faith and are not given to create it. In the time of Christ miracles were refused to an evil and adulterous generation having *no* faith. Moses believed in the God of his fathers. That same God appeared in the bush that burned and was not consumed. That vision of God confirmed his faith while instructing him. In it God was revealed under the symbol of fire. This symbol recurs throughout the Bible. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). Our God will soon be manifested in One whose eyes are as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14). He will be as a fire that burneth up His enemies round about (Psalm 97:3). The burning bush, however, was not a miracle performed by power bestowed on a man to show that God was speaking by him. This was God appearing to confirm a man in his call that would include the performing of miracles. Moses was the first to be so empowered.

The Miracles of Moses

Moses' first three miracles were performed at God's bidding as signs to Moses himself and then performed to accredit him to the Israelites as sent by God. Seeing the signs, "the people believed;

and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped." (Ex. 4:31).

Believing in God they yet had to learn that He was the only God. The assertions of the Egyptians that the objects of their own worship also were gods had to be proven false.

The *first* miracle performed by Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh and his servants was proof of this. When the rod became a serpent all Egypt's power was marshalled to equal it and to prove that Egypt's gods had no less power than Moses and Aaron had. But when Egypt's rods were swallowed up by the serpent that was Moses' rod, all Israel learned that the God of their fathers was superior to all the sorceries of Egypt. At the same time the Egyptians learned that God was manifesting His hostility to their sorceries and idolatry. *Their gods* were made to appear as they really were, unable to protect themselves much less help the people.

We are told that "the serpent was the symbol of royal and divine power on every diadem of every Pharaoh." The miracle served notice that the rod of the shepherd Moses would, by God's power, overcome all the might of Egypt.

The *second* miracle turned the water into blood. It was as real a miracle as turning water into wine. Not so, says unbelief, it often *appeared* red because of the presence of tiny animalcules and the red earth over which the swollen waters flowed. The Bible says the water became something else, *blood*; and it killed the fish and stank. The magicians could not turn it back to water or make it fit to drink. All they could do was discover some unchanged water and by enchantment make it unfit to drink, thereby polluting more water. As for the *natural* redness sometimes seen in the Nile it marks the period when the water is said to be most healthy and refreshing (Gieke).

The Nile was Egypt's boast and as sacred to them as the Ganges is to Hindus. It stood for Egypt and was itself an object of worship together with its fish. Becoming blood the religion of the land was dishonoured in one of its highest expressions, Nile worship.

The *third* miracle turned their revered river again into an object of abhorrence for out of it came forth legions of frogs. They were regarded as the symbol of fecundity or life after death. A female frog-headed deity was worshipped. She was expected to

keep swarms of frogs in control. Unbelieving Pharaoh might have said that periodic swarms of frogs had been known before. The miracle was in causing this unprecedented swarm to come at the bidding of Moses and in a manner never before known. Pharaoh was given the opportunity to say when they would miraculously cease and be found in the river only. The magicians could imitate the coming of frogs but could not prevent their coming or get them back to the river alive.

Following the frogs came lice or ticks. Their vaunted river had been their curse and now their fertile soil, also an object of worship, produces vermin at Moses' bidding. This marked the limit of the magicians power. They tried to rationalize their impotence. They admitted it was the finger of a god (8:19), but not the finger of Jehovah. They inferred a god superior to both Moses and them who had done this and so they helped Pharaoh to harden his heart against Jehovah. This vermin plague rendered all ceremonially unclean and unfit for approach to their already discredited deities. It may be appropriate to quote Psalm 2:4 and say, "He that sitteth in the heavens laughed: Jehovah had them in derision." "Judgments are prepared for scorners and stripes for the back of fools" (Prov. 19:29). The Lord God prepared great "judgments" or magisterial decisions, adverse decisions, against the gods of Egypt.

While the gods were no gods they were objects that had usurped the worship due to God alone. They had been the cause of cruelties in that their worship sanctioned such cruelties, so the gods, as though they were realities, together with their impostors of priests and their worshippers, feel the vengeance of God. Turning the water into blood was the first of these "great judgments" by which He was to redeem Israel with His stretched out arm.

The second group of three miracles differed from former ones in two respects, (1) they not only were of great inconvenience to the people but they also caused bodily hurt, and (2) Israel was exempt from them. In this way it was emphasized that it was Jehovah and not merely "God" that sent the plagues, and He set His people apart, making the visitations discriminative.

The first two while not actually performed by Moses and Aaron were announced to Pharaoh by them. The *first* was divers kinds of flies, Psalm 78:45; 105:31. They probably included beetles and some commentators translate the word for flies, in the Hebrew said to be "a mixture", as beetles. At any rate the very ground

was covered with them and their eggs must have polluted everything. Where was the power of Beelzebub, the god of the flies, who was supposed to protect Egypt from the swarms of flies? The miracle compelled them to look elsewhere for deliverance.

The *second* miracle of these three was a serious cattle plague from which Israel's cattle were exempt. A whole host of animals were objects of worship to the Egyptians and this scourge fell upon them all. The cow and ox were sacred to Isis and Osiris and the ram was the symbol of Amon. It has been pointed out that the sacred bull Apis in his gorgeous temple would have been stricken with the rest. His rotten carcass, defying the embalmers skill, carried forth to its mausoleum made it and other sacred animals offensive mockeries.

Moses and Aaron performed the next miracle. "Ashes of the furnace" were sprinkled towards heaven and both man and beast broke out in tumours and ulcers. Dumb brutes share the fate of their masters as is always the case. How many horses have died in man's wars! Brutes suffer in a cursed creation which "groans and travails together in pain" till now, waiting for the removal of the curse that came through man's sin (Romans 8:22).

In this miracle we see the persons and the possessions of the people affected, from Pharaoh down. The lordly and defiant Pharaoh did not escape this degradation. The Pyramids are lasting testimonies to the importance in which these men regarded themselves. Enormous statues of the Pharaohs were further eloquent testimony to this conceit in their importance. Now, the mighty Pharaoh with his loathsome ulcers was stripped of his pomp and pride and humiliatingly cut down to size.

The ashes sprinkled to heaven may have come from the furnace of the altar to Typhon, or Set, an evil principle, at whose altars humans were yearly burnt alive. The ashes of such sacrifices were then thrown aloft to avert plagues. In this event the miracle would make the ashes have an opposite effect to the imaginary one.

The priests, themselves suffering and defiled by the blains, could perform no ceremonies and the enchanters would not have added to this misery even had they been able, for "the boils were on the magicians." They could not appear before Moses and Aaron smitten by the Living God and pretend they had any powers to deliver themselves or the people.

Surely these plagues had the calculated effect in that they convinced the people that their gods were worthless and false,

instruments of the evil one to ruin mankind. They were admirably adapted to this purpose of removing from the minds of the Egyptians the idea that Egypt's gods were such in any sense of the word and thus destroy the confidence of the Egyptians in the power of idols to protect them.

“HE THAT IS WISE WINNETH SOULS”

(Proverbs 11: 30)

A Practical word to every Bible Student

Simon the fisherman became Peter the ‘fisher of men’ at the call of the Master. His call, in fact, came whilst fishing. How appropriate as a symbol of the new service he was to enter! The Lord’s word was simple and decisive (Lk. 5:10, R.V.): “From henceforth thou shalt *catch men*” (lit. “take men alive”, *zōgrein*). Here was service angel’s might covet, but it is providentially reserved for people like Peter (both men and women). And the response was unquestioning: “they left *all* and followed (Jesus)”. What holy alacrity, what implicit faith—an example we might well follow even today!

It is worth noting that this same Simon was himself “caught alive” by his own brother Andrew, as we read in Jn. 1:41, 42. Apparently this was Andrew’s first catch, and had he never caught another what a reward must be his throughout eternity! It reminds us of another very humble fisher of souls who, on that long-ago stormy morning in 1850, ‘landed’ a callow youth who had chanced to stray into a little wayside chapel—to become years after Charles Haddon Spurgeon the “Prince of Preachers” of the nineteenth century! “Let preachers study this story!” says Sir William Robertson Nicoll. “Let them believe that under the most adverse circumstances, they may do a work that will tell on the universe for ever. It was a great thing to have converted C.H.S.; and who knows but they may have in the smallest and humblest congregation in the world some lad as well worth converting as was he?”

Incidentally, it is instructive to turn to the only other occurrence in the New Testament of this verb *zōgrein*, in 2 Tim. 2:26, R.V. (which is preferable to the A.V. rendering). It reads: “And they may recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil, having been