

8 The LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, 9 “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Give us a warning sign,’ then you are to tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down in front of Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’” 10 Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh. They did just as the LORD had commanded. Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 But then Pharaoh also called for his wise men and sorcerers. Those magicians of Egypt did the same thing by their occult practices. 12 They each threw down their staffs, and those staffs became snakes. However, Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 But Pharaoh’s heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

There are quite a few people that claim to be speaking by divine revelation. Back in the 1980’s Benny Hinn claimed by divine revelation that God would destroy the homosexual population. In 2012 Pat Robertson claimed that God had told him that Mitt Romney would win the election. Here these men claimed to have revelation from God, but from the results they were obviously lying. They should have been held to account for their lies and deceit, but they weren’t. They still have plenty of followers who think they are speaking from God yet today. That is sad to see.

If someone is going to claim direct revelation from God, is it unfair to say to them, “Prove it!”? I don’t think so. When God called Moses and Aaron to stand before the Israelites and before Pharaoh and claim divine revelation, God knew that people would be skeptical as they should have been. If this guy is going to claim to be their leader and put their lives in danger, he better be able to prove it. So God gave Moses and Aaron signs to use as proof that God was actually speaking through them.

But even that doesn’t mean that people will listen even with a sign. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the death his enemies only plotted to kill Jesus and Lazarus. When Jesus appeared after His own resurrection the Bible still says that “some doubted.” If someone doesn’t want to believe, they can close their eyes to the most obvious of signs.

Pharaoh wasn’t going to let his slave labor go no matter what kind of signs he saw. And God knew this ahead of time. Yet God chose to show him signs anyway. Which begs the question, “If you KNOW Pharaoh isn’t going to listen, then why send any signs at all? Why not just kill him and free the Israelites right away?” But then wouldn’t God have been accused of not giving Pharaoh a fair chance? You also need to think about how God designed us. The way that my professor said it was, “God respects our humanity.” Now, when I first heard that it didn’t sound right to me. But the more I thought about it, it makes sense. Even though our human will can be very stubborn and evil in its fallen state, God doesn’t stop us from doing what we want to do. He allows us to exercise our will, even when our will is evil. So if Pharaoh wants to be a stubborn idiot in the face of an Almighty God, God wouldn’t stop him from doing what he was doing. But God wasn’t going to stop doing what He was going to do either. The more stubborn Pharaoh was, the more God would get to show His power

over all of the gods of Egypt. God didn't just put Pharaoh to death. He let Pharaoh be Pharaoh while God continued to be God.

It would be good for us to remember this in life. Imagine if someone had a pet dog that kept on getting loose? Sometimes it growled at you, and sometimes it went to the bathroom on your lawn. Would you take out the dog's teeth? Would you poison it? Would you call the dog catcher? Would you put a fence around your yard? What if that dog was your dog, who was great with you and your family? It's different when it's YOUR pet.

But we're not talking about dogs. We're talking about humans who are much more complex than dogs. Sinful people and evil people do sinful and evil things in a variety of evil ways. God doesn't want any of them to be damned. And if we want God to stop them from doing and being evil, then how do we want that to happen? Do you want God to kill them before they do the evil they want to do? That seems kind of harsh. Do we want Him to stop them from desiring it? Or do you just want Him to stop them from actually DOING it without killing them? At what point do you want Him to step in? How do you want Him to step in? If certain evil things never were "allowed" to happen, at what time in point would we really cease being human or stop having any freedom, like neutering a dog that you don't want to have babies? God has infinitely more knowledge than we do in how to deal with a fallen humanity, even the ones in powerful positions. When we see how God has dealt with humanity in the history of the Bible, He wants us to trust that He knows what He's doing.

So look at the interesting way God chooses to deal with Pharaoh, through two older men in their 80's and a staff. **The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."** I did a little research on the Egyptian view of snakes. Wikipedia says, "Ancient Egyptians worshipped snakes, especially the cobra. The cobra was not only associated with the sun god Ra, but also many other deities . . . Wadjet was the patron goddess of Upper Egypt, and was represented as a cobra with spread hood, or a cobra-headed woman. She later became one of the protective emblems on the pharaoh's crown once Upper and Lower Egypt were united. She was said to 'spit fire' at the pharaoh's enemies, and the enemies of Ra." When Moses first threw the staff down in private he was afraid and ran from it when it turned into a snake. Perhaps God just wanted to intimidate Pharaoh by miraculously putting a live snake in front of him and then grabbing hold of it and turning it back to wood. Maybe He was saying to Pharaoh, "Look at me pick your god up by the tail and turn him into wood like nothing."

Pharaoh didn't want to believe this was anything special. So he called on his magicians and asked them to perform the same thing. It's kind of scary to think that they actually could! What does this show us? Satan can do powerful things. People still use Satanic arts to try and curse and harm people through a strand of hair or incantation of some sort. According to a 2017 article in the BBC, there is actually a Facebook group of Wiccan witches which recite a monthly incantation against President Trump. "Followers of magic are told to carve the president's name into the candle using a pin, recite an

incantation, and then burn his picture in the flame.” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39090334>) Here we have people still drawing on the dark powers in order to defeat someone they consider to be their enemy. Don't underestimate their power.

It is interesting to note that Paul warned how God would allow Satan to do this as the end grows nearer. He wrote in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2,

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

When people don't want to believe the plain word of God and they have a desire to believe lies that suit what they WANT to hear, God allows the lies to mislead them by having them be accompanied by fake miracles, signs and wonders.

I can't say that I've personally seen any false and deceptive signs that I know of. But it would seem to me that Satan doesn't really need to use them, not when people don't even believe the natural signs that point to God. Take for instance pregnancy. It doesn't matter how many videos can be made of a baby growing inside a mother's womb, if people don't want to believe there is a human life there they will ignore the evidence and just say, "Woman's choice! Fertilized cells! Nothing to see here!" Think of the complexity of DNA which points to a designer. You can't help but see it, but it doesn't matter. No matter what is so evident, if people don't want to see the signs, they will believe in aliens before they will believe in God. So why would Satan use powerful signs when he doesn't have to?

In reality, God left no room for doubt. **Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.** Even though the magicians were able to mimic the miracle, God's power still came to the fore. There was a clear distinction between the two. We can't forget that. Satan is powerful, but God is much more powerful. Sooner or later, God will win no matter how deceptive and powerful Satan is.

I think about the abortion debate. What is there really to debate? When you see a baby growing in the womb, the miracle is there. You can see it. There is a living baby there who is miraculously coming to grow by the powerful design of God. Anyone can see this is a human. There's a powerful sign of life there, no matter how much they shout freedom and choice. Marriage, when it is done right - when a husband and wife love and honor each other - when they are given children and they raise their children to love and forgive - there is a powerful design and a powerful unit that can't be mimicked and can't be beaten by any other imitations. This is how God designed it - for a man and a woman to love each other for life and raise children together in the comfort and protection of their homes. No matter how Satan tries to misdirect what love is and what marriage is, God's way is more powerful than any of Satan's ways.

Whatever Satan tries to throw in God's way, He has the power to swallow it up. Isn't that why we are here, because God was able to take our most vicious foe, sin and death itself, and swallow it to come out alive? We have a God who took on flesh! Why? So that He could put His flesh on the cross and die for the sins of the world, only to come from the grave three days late. Jesus swallowed death and came out alive! What other sign do we need? Our sins have been paid for by His death on the cross. Our future is sure in His resurrection from the dead, which means that we too will live. Jesus is the only sign we need. So we are washed in Him through the water of baptism. We eat Him through the bread and wine of the Supper. He Himself is hidden within the signs of the sacraments, and through these seemingly weak and common elements, miracles happen. God powerfully comes to us, gives us life, forgives our sins, conquers death, and we live.

Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

God knew this would happen. But the LORD had bigger plans than just messing with the hard hearted Pharaoh. He wanted the WORLD to see who He was. So the LORD went from a private showing of signs to a public showing. Soon all would witness the frogs and the gnats and the darkness and so much more. Even the magicians would have to humbly admit, "**This is the finger of God**" when they couldn't repeat the miracles. Through it all, Pharaoh wouldn't listen, but many other people did. Long before the Israelites ever arrived in the Promised Land - 40 years later - people were still talking about the miracles God performed in Egypt and they still knew they shouldn't mess with this God, because He was willing to powerfully rescue His people. They could either get on their knees and worship that God or get in His way and die trying. Some of those people repented and turned to this LORD. Other people rebelled and died. Pharaoh was one of them.

What about you?

I assume you are here because God has captured your heart. He has shown you His power and His mercy and His love in Jesus Christ and brought you to faith. If not, think twice about what you are doing. Don't follow in the footsteps of Pharaoh. Repent and believe in the God who has conquered death in order to rescue you from your sins and take you to heaven.

As Christians, we don't have any staffs to throw on the ground before people. We have a little bit of water, some bread and some wine. We have some words to speak, words of sin and grace, law and gospel, repentance and faith. We have a Savior to point to - a powerful God who took on flesh to live and die for the sins of the world. We point to the skies and say, "He is coming again." The same God who worked through a staff and through some 80 year old men can still work through us. Some will listen. Some will laugh. Some will dig in their heels and scoff. Others will get on their knees and pray. After all is said and done, God's will will be done, and God's people will be free. Amen.