

Exodus 15-20

Signs Shown to the Children of Israel

Chapters 15 - 20 of Exodus teach us very important things about faith-the first principle of the gospel. The Israelites were witnesses of miracles on a daily basis. Did that make them more religious? Did signs cement their belief in God, fortify their trust in Moses, and solidify their determination to keep the commandments?

Bruce C. Hafen

If it is so important for us to know [God] today, why doesn't the Lord send a great chariot across the sky every day at noon, drawn by flying white horses? The chariot could stop right above the earth and then a voice from the great beyond could say, "And now a word from our Creator."

Why has he chosen not to do things like that? ("The Value of the Veil," *Ensign*, June 1977, 10)

I love the quote above because we can't imagine such an overt demonstration of divine power. Having lived by faith and not by sight, we often yearn for the kind of signs that the children of Israel saw on a daily basis. The question is a fair one, "Why has god not chosen to do things like that?" Truth is He has tried it-at least once. In fact, the Israelites witnessed greater signs than a chariot led by white horses flying across the sky on a daily basis. What is unfathomable to us was commonplace to them. Let's review the history, the signs, and the effect it had upon the people.

- **Plagues of Egypt**-The children of Israel were spared all the destruction brought upon their Egyptian masters. Their bondage and heavy burdens were released in answer to their prayers. The manner in which they were released could not have been more dramatic; God's power was shown in an indisputable way.
- **Egyptian Army Buried in Red Sea**-Who could question the power of God in this instance? Modern scientists have tried to explain away this Biblical story. Maybe a great wind could dry out a shallow area of the Red Sea providing dry land for the Israelites to cross. The Bible, however, presents a narrative much more like the familiar scenes from the movie, "The Ten Commandments," where walls of water on both sides were raised by the power of God. "The waters were

gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." (Ex. 15:8) Never in history has water defied gravity as it did in this instance.

- **Healing of the Waters of Marah (Ex. 15:23-27)**-Having just witnessed these great demonstrations of God's power, the children of Israel were quick to forget and quick to complain. Only three days journey from the Red Sea, the Israelites complain of thirst. Their complaint could be characterized as Laman-and-Lemuel-like *murmuring*, a term synonymous with faithless complaint against God and his prophets. What is the Lord's response to their faithless complaint? He shows Moses a tree, which when cast into the bitter waters of Marah, heals them (foreshadowing the Messiah healing the waters of the Dead Sea after the Second Coming; see Ezek. 47). Has anyone seen such a miracle? What wizard can cast a tree into bitter waters and make them pure? The very Fountain of Living Waters has provided Israel with pure water to drink. How could anyone doubt his power? That it not all-as if to recognize their suffering for water, the Lord leads them to an oasis with 12 wells and an unlimited supply of water for the next four weeks (Ex. 15:27). As **Elder Maxwell** noted, "murmurers have short memories. Israel arrived in Sinai, then journeyed on to the Holy Land though they were sometimes hungry and thirsty. But the Lord rescued them, whether by the miraculous appearance by quail or by water struck from a rock. (See Num. 11:31; Ex. 17:6.) Strange, isn't it, brothers and sisters, how those with the shortest memories have the longest lists of demands! However, with no remembrance of past blessings, there is no perspective about what is really going on." ("Murmur Not," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 83)
- **Manna and Quail (Ex. 16)**-Only one month after the miraculous Exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel complain again. They don't say, "Moses, great prophet of God, what shall we do seeing we suffer with hunger? What will God do for us?" Rather, their response is, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex. 16:3). The Lord's response, "I will rain bread from heaven for you" (Ex. 16:4). You can eat snow; you can drink rainwater, but never has food literally fallen from heaven. He also sends quail to cover the camp, an unlikely natural phenomenon to be sure. So many elements of manna are miraculous that they deserve separate mention:

- Every morning, like clockwork, the ground is covered with the substance
- Every day, in the heat of the sun it melts, meaning that the Israelites are daily reliant upon the goodness of God for their sustenance.
- They are not allowed to keep it overnight because it spoils, unless it is the day before the Sabbath, in which case, the manna remains edible, thereby emphasizing the importance of Sabbath rest.
- For 40 years, the Israelites are daily fed from heaven (Josh. 5:12)
- Manna, like a honey-flavored cereal, falls daily from heaven
- **Water supplied from the rock in Horeb (Ex. 17:1-7)**-Again the Israelites complain for lack of water. This time there is no muddy pond in which Moses can throw a purifying tree. Having daily eaten food fallen from heaven, the children of Israel still doubt Moses; they doubt that God can quench their thirst after all they have witnessed. They are about ready to stone Moses after all the Lord has done for them. Moses is commanded to take his rod, smite the rock, and the Lord would provide water. Moses followed this command and the people drink (a second, similar account in Numbers 20:8-12, records God commanding Moses to speak to the rock not smite it. He also presumptuously took credit for the miracle and so displeased God; see Numbers 20:12 and *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, p. 243 by Spencer W. Kimball. The accounts probably refer to two separate events; in the Exodus account Moses is commanded to *smite* the rock while in the Numbers account Moses is commanded to *speak* to the rock.).
- **Joshua beats the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16)**-As if miraculous food and drink were not enough, the Lord would again fight their battles. Had Joshua and his army beaten the Amalekites without help, the children of Israel would not be indebted to the Lord. But the Lord made sure that the victory would be clearly heaven sent-only when Moses raised his hands toward heaven, the source of their success, could the Israelites prevail against Amalek. Indeed, the children of Israel are given sign after sign after sign.
- **The presence of God descends upon Sinai with fire, smoke, and an earthquake (Ex. 19:10-25)**-Here we are reminded of the quote from Elder Hafen, "The chariot could stop right above the earth and then a voice from the great beyond could say, 'And now a word from our Creator.'" The chariot example pales in comparison to the scene shown the children of Israel. If the destruction of Egypt wasn't

enough, if walls of water in the midst of the Red Sea wasn't enough, if bread literally raining down from heaven is not enough to convince you, then how about the presence of God descending with fire, smoke, and an earthquake upon the mountain?

- **Children of Israel hear the voice of God speaking to their prophet Moses (Ex. 19:19)**-The Exodus version records, "when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" (Ex: 19:20). This is the part we have waited for, "a word from our Creator." Did the children of Israel actually hear the voice of the Lord? They did; they heard Moses their prophet converse with the Lord! How easy is it to believe in God and his prophet when you have witnessed such a scene? Moses was just as incredulous with the disbelief of his people:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?

Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.

Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;

To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.

Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.

Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever. (Deut. 4:32-40)

Dallin H. Oaks

The viewing of signs or miracles is not a secure foundation for conversion. Scriptural history attests that people converted by signs and wonders soon forget them and again become susceptible to the lies and distortions of Satan and his servants. (Hel. 16:23; 3 Ne. 1:22, 2:1, 8:4) "How long will this people provoke me?" the Lord said to Moses, "and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs that I have shewed among them?" (Num. 14:11.)

Jesus made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but John records in sadness, "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." (John 12:37.)

In contrast to the witness of the Spirit, which can be renewed from time to time as needed by a worthy recipient, the viewing of a sign or the experiencing of a miracle is a one-time event that will fade in the memory of its witness and can dim in its impact upon him or her. For example, as **President Kimball** observed, "Oliver Cowdery saw many signs. He handled the sacred plates; saw John the Baptist; received the higher priesthood from Peter, James, and John, and was the recipient of many great miracles, and yet they could not hold him to the faith."

President George Q. Cannon summarized the experience: "I do not believe that men can be convinced as they should be convinced by such manifestations. It has been a matter of remark among those who have had experience in this Church, that where men have been brought into the Church by such manifestations, it has required a constant succession of them to keep them in the Church; their faith has had to be constantly strengthened by witnessing some such manifestations; but where they have been convinced by the outpouring of the spirit of God, where their judgment has been convinced, where they have examined for themselves and become satisfied by the testimony of Jesus in answer to their prayers and to their faithful seeking unto the Lord for knowledge-where this has been the case they have been more likely to stand, more likely to endure persecution and trial than those who have been convinced through some supernatural manifestation of the character to which I have alluded."

The true church does not convert by signs and wonders, but by the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The Lord's way of teaching religious truths is not by a public miracle or sign, but by a personal testimony. (*The Lord's Way* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991], 87-88)

Spencer J. Condie

"How could they forget so fast?" my children asked
As we read our way through Exodus.
"The plagues that God sent to deliver them from Pharaoh's slavery,
And the parting of the Red Sea,
The discovery of living water to quench parched throats!
Didn't the daily supply of manna convince them of God's love for them?
Hadn't the cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night taught them
That he lives, that he cares for them?"

"The children of Israel were spiritually immature," I confidently replied.
"They didn't have burning testimonies of the gospel or testimonies of Moses' holy mission.
"Thank goodness, children, we're not like that today."

And then I thought ...

About the time one of the children had been miraculously healed.
I knelt to thank God,
Then returned to my building project, hit my thumb and swore a blue streak.

... about our financial security and physical well-being
Like manna in the wilderness.
Then the Bishop asked \$500 for the building fund
And I assured him that new car payments would prevent participation at this time.

... a four bedroom home for four children isn't adequate.
And you can't really have a good party in a living room this size.
It would be nice to have some horses for the kids.
And so we built the house complete with pool and thanked the Lord that we could build a bigger place.

... of course, the bigger house payments meant my wife had to work,
And with my extra moonlighting and all-
How could the bishop expect us to work in the Church?

No, children, with our 400-horsepower commitment and our split-level devotion,
We can be thankful that we'd never worship a golden calf.
("Israel, Golden Calves, and Me," *Ensign*, Apr. 1976, 9)

Exodus 17:11-12 Moses' hands were heavy... and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands

Ezra Taft Benson

My beloved brethren and sisters, I wish to testify to you that the Lord Jesus Christ stands at the head of His church-even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are His earthly stewards-we hold His priesthood, administer His ordinances, preach His gospel, and build up His kingdom.

I have not words to express my gratitude to God, the Father of our spirits, to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Ghost, the Testator.

I wish to convey my appreciation to all those who raised their hands in a covenant to the Lord to sustain me. I have felt the expression of your hearts and your commitment to the Lord as your hands pointed heavenward.

I am reminded how Moses up on the hill raised his arms for the victory of the armies of Israel. As long as his arms were raised, Israel prevailed, but when they dropped from weariness, then the enemy prevailed. And so Aaron and Hur "stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side," and Israel was victorious. (Ex. 17:12.) So will we be victorious as we hold up the arms of the Lord's anointed servants...

I am grateful for the strong counselors whom the Lord has provided me-President Gordon B. Hinckley and President Thomas S. Monson. Both have been prepared by the Lord for the labor they are performing. Each has been and is now a great blessing to the kingdom of God, and I thank Him for them. ("A Sacred Responsibility," *Ensign*, May 1986, 77)

Boyd K. Packer

The wicked who now oppose the work of the Lord, while different from, are no less terrible than the plundering Amalekites. The sustaining of the prophet is still an essential ongoing part of the safety of this people. Should age and infirmity cause his hands to grow heavy, they are held up by his counselors at his side. Both are prophets, seers, and revelators, as is each member of the Quorum of the Twelve. ("The Shield of Faith," *Ensign*, May 1995, 8)

Jethro visits and counsels Moses

JST Exodus 18:1 Jethro, the high priest of Midian

"Jethro was very important in Moses' life and work. The Old Testament calls him 'the priest of Midian,' but modern revelation through Joseph Smith throws important light upon the priesthood of Jethro. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, section 84, Moses received the 'Holy Priesthood ... under the hand of his father-in-law, Jethro.' (D&C 84:6.) It is reasonable to believe that Jethro held the office of a high priest and may have presided over a branch of the church in Midian. (See JST, Ex. 18:1.)

"It is interesting to note that Jethro's priesthood is traced through Caleb and Elihu back to Melchizedek and Noah and thence to Adam. (D&C 84:7-16.) The fact that he held the Melchizedek Priesthood contributes to our believing that a branch of the church of Jesus Christ was in Midian. This is a surprising fact, since the Old Testament says nothing at this point about a church. But, thanks to the Prophet Joseph Smith, we may assume that Jethro had possession of the scriptures and taught Moses the gospel when he became a member of his household." (Sidney B. Sperry, "The Mission of Moses: Out of Bondage," *Ensign*, Oct. 1973, 32)

Exodus 18:18 Thou wilt surely wear away

"Too often I find myself so wrapped up in the thick of thin things that I feel almost as though I can't breathe, let alone rest. I drain my energy dry doing ten worthwhile activities-and neglect three eternally important ones. At times like this, I could learn from the counsel Moses' father-in-law gave him: 'The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away ... for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it.' (Ex. 18:17-18.) Several weeks ago I looked back over my daily schedules and realized I had wasted much energy and had worn myself out over things that were overdone or were in some ways unnecessary. So what if I baked several varieties of cookies for the party and found the best buys in town if I'm too tired to cuddle with my children or be with my husband or if I fall asleep while I'm trying to say my prayers?" (Cindy K. Peterson, "Exhaustion Is Not a Prerequisite to Perfection," *Ensign*, Oct. 1993, 52)

Neal A. Maxwell

We generally see the need for Moses to apply the delegation dimension, and we note how both we *and those we serve*-including family-can "wear away." Moses was hearing every case! Worse still, however, this pattern kept him from his real duties, which were to "teach them ordinances and laws, and ...

shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do" (Ex. 18:20).

The original Twelve were counseled that they were not to "serve tables" (see Acts 6:1-4). Actually, serving tables is easy. It is visible, measurable, and doable-compared to opening up the nations of the world to missionary work or to keeping wolves out of the flock. But if the Twelve were drawn away from their scriptural and constitutional duties, the whole Church would suffer. Being drawn away can happen to all of us, almost without our knowing it. ("Wisdom and Order," *Ensign*, June 1994, 41-42)

Exodus 18:20 thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way

"Moses was killing himself off, trying to do everything for the children of Israel, to judge all matters, large and small. His father-in-law, Jethro, saw all this and advised, 'The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.'

"Jethro then counseled Moses to do two things. First, Moses was to teach the people principles that embodied his judgments so they wouldn't have to come to him to decide every matter. They could reflect on the principles and think their problems through on their own. This is a powerful form of delegation-teaching true principles and trusting the people to apply them." (Stephen R. Covey, *How to Succeed with People* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971], 100)

John Taylor

Some years ago, in Nauvoo, a gentleman in my hearing, a member of the Legislature, asked Joseph Smith how it was that he was enabled to govern so many people, and to preserve such perfect order; remarking at the same time that it was impossible for them to do it anywhere else. Mr. Smith remarked that it was very easy to do that. "How?" responded the gentleman; "to us it is very difficult." Mr. Smith replied, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves." (*Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, edited by Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], "Agency")

Exodus 18:22 they shall bear the burden with thee

M. Russell Ballard

Not only is this a great lesson for all of us on the importance of delegation of priesthood authority, but it also illustrates the need for presidents and bishops to allow their counselors, auxiliary leaders, and other associates to "bear the burden with thee." Remember, presidents and bishops, that the callings of your associates are just as divinely inspired as is yours, and they are therefore entitled to inspiration in their specific responsibilities. Lean upon them. Learn from them. Love them. Listen to them. (Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997], 67 - 68)

Exodus 18:23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so

"It is notable that in verse 23 Jethro adds, 'If thou shalt do this thing, *and God command thee* so, then thou shalt be able to endure.' [Ex. 18:23] (Italics added.) At least one implication here is Jethro's clear recognition that the decision ultimately lay between Moses and the Lord. Apparently, Moses took the suggestion to the Lord and obtained approval because the next verse tells us, 'So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.'

"Offering suggestions to Church leaders from time to time, then, seems to be entirely appropriate, but in doing so we must first make sure that our motives are pure and that the suggestion has merit. Among those questions that we need to ask ourselves are: What is my purpose in wanting to offer my suggestion? Is my idea just a pet peeve of mine, or is it a valid suggestion that could prove helpful? Am I attempting to counsel the Lord or his servants, or am I truly making a suggestion? Have I thought the idea through to see its implications clearly and be sure that it has genuine merit? Can I offer the suggestion without being hostile?" (Bruce L. Olsen, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Aug. 1978, 30)

Neal A. Maxwell

Notice the blend of loving concern and candor with Jethro taking the initiative. And Moses, who was the most meek of men on earth, accepted the counsel (see Num. 12:3).

Further, when we are being spoken to by one who is inspired by the Holy Spirit, hopefully he will not hold back simply to be artificially nice to us. (*Ensign*, Apr. 1981, 58)

Exodus 19:5 ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people

Bruce R. McConkie

Because their numbers were known and the days of their mortal probation were selected in advance, Moses was able to say: "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." (Deut. 32:8-9.) And thus Jehovah said to Israel anciently: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Ex. 19:5-6.) "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." (Deut. 7:6; 14:2.) And thus Peter said to Israel in his day: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet. 2:9.) And as it was in those days, so it is today. Gathered Israel is now and everlastingly shall be a holy nation, a peculiar people, and a kingdom of priests who minister salvation to the peoples of the world.

Israel are the seed of Abraham; they are the children of the prophets; and they associate with the Lord's seers. Israel are the friends of apostles and revelators; they are the children of God by faith; they are the sons and daughters of the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name they worship the Father. Paul acclaims that they are the ones "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." They are the nation "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came." (*The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982], 183)

Joseph Smith

When the children of Israel were chosen with Moses at their head, they were to be a peculiar people, among whom God should place His name; their motto was: "The Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our King, and He shall reign over us." (Isa. 33:22) While in this state they might truly say, "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." (Ps 144:15) Their government was a theocracy; they had God to make their laws, and men chosen by Him to administer them; He was their God, and they were His people. Moses received the word of the Lord from God Himself; he was the

mouth of God to Aaron, and Aaron taught the people, in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs; they were both one, there was no distinction; so will it be when the purposes of God shall be accomplished: when "the Lord shall be King over the whole earth," and "Jerusalem His throne." "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

This is the only thing that can bring about the "restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy Prophets since the world was"- "the dispensation of the fullness of times, when God shall gather together all things in one." (*History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. 5:64)

Exodus 20: The Ten Commandments

Joseph F. Smith

I believe with all my soul in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in the law of God, and I do not think any honest and intelligent man or woman could help but believe in the justice, the righteousness and the purity of the laws that God wrote upon the tablets of stone., These principles that I propose to read to you are the foundation and basic principles of the Constitution of our country, and are eternal, enduring forevermore, and cannot be changed nor ignored with impunity. (*Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, compiled by John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], 401)

Ezra Taft Benson

I would urge you to heed strictly the commandments of God, particularly the Ten Commandments. As long as we regard God as our Sovereign and uphold His laws, we shall be free from bondage and be protected from external danger.

God has not left us alone to flounder over right and wrong in the area of personal ethics and morality. His laws are circumscribed in the Decalogue-the Ten Commandments. These laws embody our relationships with God, family, and fellowmen. Yes, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are the foundation principles upon which our personal happiness is predicated. To disregard them will lead to inevitable personal character loss and ruin. (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], 353)

Spencer W. Kimball

Moses came down from the quaking, smoking Mount Sinai and brought to the wandering children of Israel the Ten Commandments, fundamental rules for the conduct of life. These commandments were, however, not new. They had been known to Adam and his posterity, who had been commanded to live them from the beginning, and were merely reiterated by the Lord to Moses. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, edited by Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 150)