

# Exodus 4:1-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-4/exodus-41-9/>

*Moses' third objection deals with unbelief on the part of the Israelites. "What if they do not believe me?" seems to be the issue. The LORD answers him with three miracles.*

In spite of the LORD's assurance that the Israelite leaders will believe him (3:18), Moses still asked *What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?* It may not be that Moses was flatly contradicting the LORD. Keep in mind that the LORD had not communicated directly to His people in over 400 years, and it is highly likely that the Israelites would be skeptical if someone appeared declaring that God spoke to him. In fact, Moses gave an example of their response, *For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'*

In response to Moses, the LORD used visible evidence (called "signs" – vv. 8, 9) to confirm that what He was saying was true. In the first two objections, the LORD spoke to Moses. Here, He used miracles to drive home His point.

The first miracle (or "sign") involved the shepherd staff that Moses used for herding the sheep. *The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"* Moses responded, "A staff." This is the shepherd staff that Moses had probably been carrying around for a long time. To him, it was nothing but a piece of lifeless lumber used in shepherding the flock. The LORD instructed Moses to *"Throw it on the ground."* Moses obeyed – *he threw it on the ground.* Then the miracle occurred when *it became a serpent.* Moses did what he thought was the smart thing when he *fled from it.* However, *the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail."* Normally, one grabs a snake behind its head to avoid getting bitten. Grabbing a snake by its tail is a sure way to get a possibly fatal bite. In spite of this danger, *the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail."* Amazingly, *Moses stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand.* For Moses to do this took quite a bit of faith and courage. He had to overcome his fear of what could happen to him and trust that God is in control.

Snakes symbolized life and power to the Egyptians. On top of that, in the Bible, the serpent represents Satan (Genesis 3), the enemy of humankind. So, for the LORD to turn a staff into a snake and back again showed Moses (and later the Egyptians) that He is sovereign over the spiritual powers of the

Egyptians and even the whole world. By having Moses grab the snake, the LORD was showing Moses that He had the power to show Pharaoh and the Egyptians that he is the true God's representative.

Then the LORD repeated the purpose of this miracle – *that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.* It is important that the Israelites believed that the LORD had sent Moses so they would obey and thus get out of slavery and go to the Promised Land.

Whereas the first miracle demonstrated the LORD's sovereignty over the spirit world, the second miracle/sign (verses 6 – 7) involves His sovereignty over the physical world. It includes the LORD having Moses experience a severe illness and then healing it.

It starts when *the Lord furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom."* Moses complied when *he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.* The word "leprous" is a term that can refer to many different types of skin ailments. It could be what we know today as leprosy. It was prevalent in ancient Egypt and was considered incurable. The fact that his hand was *like snow* (i.e. white) was an indication that the disease was quite advanced and that Moses was in the beginning stages of death. Though the passage does not say, it is not a stretch to think that Moses was surprised and horrified by this. But the LORD instructed him to put his hand *into your bosom again.* Moses again obeyed – *he put his hand into his bosom again, and another miracle occurs because when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.* Moses was probably greatly relieved.

What the LORD seems to be doing is showing Moses is that He is the ruler of the physical universe, including life and death. He is not bound by the laws of nature (which He established).

As if this were not enough, the LORD gave Moses a third miracle/sign (verses 8-9) so that, in case *they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign they may believe the witness of the last sign.* The LORD reassured Moses that *if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, there is a third sign.* The LORD gave instructions to Moses that he *shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.* Notice the future tense of this sign – it is one that will happen in the future. In fact, it did occur as the first plague (7:15 – 21). The Egyptians thought of the Nile as a god

(possibly Osiris, the life-giving god of good and prosperity). For Moses to turn the Nile into blood (which killed all of the life in the river) shows that the God of Moses (the LORD) is the ruler of life and death and sovereign over the gods of Egypt. The people of both Israel and Egypt needed to learn this lesson.

Note also that all three signs were given to support Moses' claim that he was the LORD's appointed deliverer. They also were meant to provide more reassurance of His presence and control to Moses himself and give him the confidence to carry out the LORD's will.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup>Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" <sup>2</sup>The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." <sup>3</sup>Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. <sup>4</sup>But the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail"—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— <sup>5</sup>"that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."**

**<sup>6</sup>The Lord furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. <sup>7</sup>Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of his flesh*. <sup>8</sup>"If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. <sup>9</sup>But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."**