

December 18th, 2022

Three Signs of Christ

Exodus 4:1-9

Typology

We cannot understand the Bible correctly if we fail to see that God communicates to us through signs or types. Yes it's true that when studying the Scripture we need approach it *grammatically*: what does this word mean? What is the significance of this verb tense? We also need to approach it *historically*: when did this happen? What is the cultural context? How would the original audience have understood it? But it is equally true that we approach the Scripture *typologically*.¹ Recall that a *type* is something that prefigures something else. The *antitype* is what the type points to. This idea of type/antitype is not something invented by theologians, rather it originated from God Himself.

The origins of types

Please turn to **Genesis 3:15**. Our familiarity with this verse might prevent us from seeing that this is the origin of typology. What does it say? Starting in **v.14** "The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'" Here we see that God is actually speaking about two different things. In **v.14**, *who* is God primarily speaking to? Physical serpents. *Who* is He speaking to in **v.15**? The devil. Christ, the seed of the woman—the One born to the virgin Mary—did not come to crush a physical snake's head, but He came into the world to crush the devil's head. From the very beginning of Scripture, God is teaching us typology. A physical serpent is a type of the devil who is the antitype.

¹ WCF 1.9 "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

The signs that tell a story

In our passage this morning, Moses is given *three signs*—three types as it were—that point to *something else*. We know these are signs because the text explicitly tells us. **v.8-9** says “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to *the first sign*, they may believe *the latter sign*.⁹ If they will not believe even *these two signs* or listen to your voice, you shall...” give them *this third sign*. Signs, like types, reveal what C.S. Lewis was fond of saying, a deeper magic. They express a truth deeper than what is on the surface. These signs that Moses saw were indeed incredible miracles—incredible displays of the power of Almighty Jehovah. But these signs were not mere displays of God’s power. These signs, like the baptism we just saw—were meant to tell a deeper story. They were meant to tell the Christmas story. How God sent His Son into the world, to defeat the serpent once and for all, to cure our incurable disease, and to make satisfaction for our sins by His own blood.

The Big Idea...

God tells us the story of Jesus Christ delivering us from our slavery to sin through wonderful signs *that we may believe*

- ☆ The Staff and the Serpent
- ☆ The Disease and Its Cure
- ☆ The Water and the Blood

I. The Staff and the Serpent

Re-orientating ourselves

If you are just joining us, Moses is on Mt. Horeb with the Angel of the LORD speaking to him from the Burning Bush. This is none other than the pre-

incarnate Christ. He commissions Moses to go back to Egypt to be the instrument of delivering Israel out of their slavery. Moses asked two questions thus far. The first question he asked was in **3:11** Moses asked "...[but] who am I that I should go...?" The LORD answered by assuring him that He would be with Moses (**v.12**). The second question Moses asked was in **v.13** "...[but] what is his name?" The LORD answered saying "I AM WHO I AM." He is Yahweh—the self-existent, eternal, unchangeable, covenant keeping God (**v.14-15**).

Moses' first objection

Arriving in chapter four, Moses starts to raise objections to his mission. Please look at **v.1** "Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'"" Who is the 'they' Moses has in mind here? Not the Egyptians. It was a foregone conclusion that the Egyptians would not believe. Moses was afraid that Israel—God's own people—*would not believe* the LORD appeared to him and commissioned him to deliver Israel out of Egyptian slavery. So how does God answer? He graciously gives Moses three signs.²

The shepherd's staff

Let's look at the first sign. **v.2** The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." Stop. This staff is going to play a prominent role in leading Israel out of Egypt. The LORD attached power to it. Look at what it's called at the end of **v.20** "And Moses took *the staff of God* in his hand." This staff turned the Nile into blood (**7:20**); it summoned the frogs that covered Egypt (**8:5**); it turned the dust into gnats (**8:17**); it brought the thunder and hail (**9:23**); it called forth the locusts (**10:13**); and it divided the Red Sea (**14:16**). Now Israel didn't know these things were going to happen. But they did know what a staff was for. They were shepherds after all. A shepherd's staff was used to lead, govern and defend the flock. The staff was *a sign* to Israel that Moses was going to lead, govern and defend God's flock from Egypt.

² "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22)

The cursed serpent

Look what happens next. **v.3** The LORD tells Moses: “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it.” Stop. Children, why did Moses run from the serpent? Because he was scared. *Why?* Because serpents can bite and kill you. But children is there a deeper truth here? What did the serpent represent? Satan and his seed. Moses and Israel would have known this. They knew how sin came into the world, through that ancient serpent who is the devil.³ Furthermore, Egypt their slave masters identified themselves with serpents. One historian says here:

“The cobra represented in particular the national god of Lower Egypt and was the foremost symbol of Pharaoh, reflecting his claim to divine royalty, sovereignty, and power. Therefore, it constantly appears on his crown or helmet, as depicted in reliefs, paintings and statues. His scepter is often a stylized cobra. Even the Egyptian gods are frequently depicted with a scepter in the form of a snake.”⁴

Yahweh’s authority over the serpent

Israel would have seen this with their own eyes. They knew Egypt was the seed of the serpent incarnate.⁵ What happens next? Moses was staring at this serpent that was slithering and hissing on the ground in front of him. Look at **v.4** “But the Lord said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail” —so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—” What does this signify? Israel was under the oppression of the serpent—the

³ Revelation 12:9

⁴ Göran Larsson quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus, Saved for God’s Glory*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2015), pg. 97. “The asp played a conspicuous part in Egyptian mythology. It was the emblem of the goddess Ranno, the snake of Neph, the hieroglyphic of ‘goddess,’ and the sign of royalty.” F. W. Grant quoted in Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, (Vallecito, CA.,: Ross House Books), pg. 45

⁵ This is what Scripture says as well in Isaiah 51:9 “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?”

Egyptians and Pharaoh had injected their venom into Israel—but now the serpent was going to be changed by the power of God into a dry stick. Yahweh has all authority over the serpent. Israel would have understood the sign. That’s *why* the LORD says in v.5 “...*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.” This sign is a story of their being set free and it came with a miraculous demonstration of power.

The deeper truth: the shepherd became a serpent

But there is a *deeper truth* for us. Just as the entire Exodus account is a *type* of the redemption wrought for us by Jesus Christ,⁶ so this sign points to what He accomplished for us. Dear congregation, this **first sign** is for you: *Christ who is the staff God—the Good Shepherd—became the cursed serpent in order to set you free.* Listen to how Jonathan Edwards puts it:

“Moses cast his [staff] on the ground, and it became a serpent, and he took it up, and it became a [staff] again, signifying how that Christ, when he was sent down by God to the earth, and was made sin for us, became guilty for our sakes, was accursed, and appeared in the form of sinful flesh: he appeared in our stead, having our guilt imputed to him, who are a generation of vipers...The [staff became] a serpent...so Christ, by his being made sin for us, destroyed sin and Satan.”⁷

The scandal of Christmas

Oh the scandal of Christmas! We celebrate the fact that Christ came into the world to crush the serpent. **1 John 3:8** “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Yes but how did He do it? By becoming

⁶ cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. cf. L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP, 2020), pg. 1-6

⁷ “When Moses took up his [staff] from the ground, it was no longer a serpent, but became a [staff] again, so when God took up Christ from his stroke of humiliation, he was acquitted, justified, he had no longer the guilt of sin imputed to him, he no longer appeared in the form of sinful flesh.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 717

the serpent. The shepherd became the serpent. Not literally—Jesus did not become the devil. But He became the embodiment of the curse. **Galatians 3:13** “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” Do you see it? Christ came into the world to set you free from a slavery that you can’t see or touch.

Captured in the Barrow-downs

The serpent that enslaved you was much more powerful than Pharaoh ever was. At least Moses was able to flee from Pharaoh and escape to Midian. But no human being ever has or will be able to escape the slavery of that ancient serpent Satan.⁸ Children, boys and girls, in the Fellowship of the Ring, when the hobbits leave Tom Bombadil’s house they travel through the Barrow-downs. It’s one of the most terrifying chapters. These were treeless hills with burial mounds on top. The backstory was that a witch-king had unleashed evil spirits that haunted these tombs for a thousand years.⁹ The hobbits had stopped for lunch next to one of them and they fell asleep. When they woke up it was evening and the fog was thick. They panic and in their attempt to escape they get captured by an evil spirit and are imprisoned in one of these tombs. Merry, Pippin and Sam are under a spell with a sword lying across their necks. Frodo is terrified, realizing that there was no hope of escape.¹⁰ They were rescued again by Tom Bombadil who entered the tomb through a stream of light vanquishing the evil spirit.

Running with the devil

That’s how Scripture describes our slavery to the devil. Prior to Christ setting you free, you were under the power of Satan (**Acts 26:18**). You were imprisoned in the domain of darkness (**Colossians 1:13**). The god of this world

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:25-26

⁹ Source: <https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Barrow-downs> Accessed December 17, 2022

¹⁰ “All light vanishes as snarling noises echo all around Frodo.” Source: <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-fellowship-of-the-ring/book-1-chapter-8> Accessed December 17, 2022

had blinded your mind (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). You were in the snare of the devil, captured by him to do his will (**2 Tim. 2:26**). You were helpless and beyond all hope of escape.

Breaking the power of the devil at Christmas

But when God sent forth His Son into the world—He broke the power the serpent. Loved ones, that’s the gift of Christmas. You were under Satan’s curse and spell in the blackest darkness, and Christ Jesus, at just the right time, came to set you free. How? By taking your place, by becoming the cursed one. In in doing that, the power the devil had over you was broken. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”¹¹ That’s our **first sign**: Christ, *the staff and shepherd send from God*, became the cursed serpent in order to set you free.

II. The Disease and Its Cure

The sign of leprosy

Please look at v.6 “Again, the Lord said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprouslike snow.” This is the first mention of leprosy in Scripture, but it was not unknown to the ancient world. What is it? It “...is an infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and never damage in the arms, legs, and skin areas around your body.”¹² The first affective treatment for leprosy didn’t become available until the 1940’s.¹³ What would Israel have known about this disease? It was incurable, there was no human remedy. To get leprosy in the ancient world was not only a death sentences, but it was to live a

¹¹ John 8:36. Hebrews 2:14 “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

¹² Source: <https://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/guide/leprosy-symptoms-treatments-history> Accessed December 17, 2022

¹³ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy#Treatment_2 Accessed December 17, 2022

live in complete exile. When God dictated the law to Moses later, the leper was to live in isolation outside the camp. **Leviticus 13:45-46** “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” Moses’ leprous hand was a sign of an incurable and shameful disease.

The sign of the cure

But what does the second part of the sign signify? Look at v.7 “Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.⁸ “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.” God was confident they would have understood the meaning of the sign. So what would they have understood this mean? That though Israel had been plagued with slavery and cruelty for two centuries, God was going to cure them. Their slavery that was beyond all human remedy was going to be remedied by God Himself. Not only that, but as they would soon find out, God was going to give this leprosy, this incurable plague to Egypt. There is a reason why the 10 plagues are called plagues. As Matthew Henry says here “Moses, by the power of God, [would] bring [all these] sore diseases upon Egypt.”¹⁴ That’s what God Himself called his judgments on Egypt—a plague—a wasting disease. **Exodus 9:14** “For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.” So this sign tells the story of Israel being cured of her disease of slavery by Almighty Jehovah. No one had a remedy, save God alone.

The deeper truth: Christ became a plague for us

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/exodus/4.html>
Accessed December 17, 2022

But there is a deeper truth for us. Dear congregation, this **second sign** is for you. *Christ cured you and me of the incurable disease of sin by bearing it all upon Himself.* Listen again to how Jonathan Edwards puts it:

“By Moses’s hand is represented the hand or arm of the Lord, which often in the Old Testament signifies the Messiah. By God’s plucking His hand out of His bosom, is meant His appearing for the salvation of his people....At length the arm of the Lord is made bare, the Messiah appears, but in such a manner that it was to the surprise and astonishment of those that saw Him—“many were astonished at you—His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind” [Isaiah 52:14]. They were offended [at] Him. “He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him” [Isaiah 53:2]. He appears in the form of sinful flesh. He was as it were diseased with the leprosy, because [He] took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses. He was made sin for us, as though He had been all over leprous or sinful.”¹⁵

Leprosy the type : sin the antitype

It has been long understood that *leprosy is the type, and sin is the antitype.* Leprosy destroys the outward man by defiling and disfiguring *the body*, making it loathsome and ugly. Sin destroys the inward man by defiling and disfiguring *the soul* making it loathsome and ugly. How was leprosy dealt with in the OT? A priest had to go outside the camp in order to examine the unclean man. (**Leviticus 14:3**). An atonement would have to be made (**Leviticus 14:10**). Only after this was done, could the man be ever be declared clean (**Leviticus 14:19**). God could heal the man, but he could not be cleansed apart from the work of the priest.

¹⁵ Edwards continues “God’s second remarkable appearance will be in the Messiah’s second coming for the actual salvation of his people, when he will appear without sin unto salvation, without the leprosy of our sin, and will appear in that glory that he had with the Father before his humiliation, which he emptied himself of at his first coming. God having answered his prayer in glorifying him with his own self, with the glory he had with him before the world was: as Moses’s hand, the second time he plucked it out of his bosom, was restored as it was at first.” Edwards, pg. 716

The ugliness of your soul

Dear congregation, the first sign showed your slavery to Satan. This sign shows your defilement due to sin. Don't you know? It is this thing—*sin*—that is the ugliness of your soul. I've been running an experiment in my own mind on my day off. How long can my family make it on Monday morning before sin, like a little fox, rears its ugly face and spoils the vineyard?¹⁶ Can we make it through coffee? Through breakfast? Through devotions? How long does it take for the leprosy of selfishness and pride and anger to show up? Try running that experiment in your home. How long can you make with your family before the leprous spots appear? Or if live by yourself and you have no one to fight with, how long can you make it before your own thoughts betray you with lust, suspicion and accusation? What about when you go to work? Do you make it haven of peace or do you contribute to the leper colony? Don't you see, the only place that is fit for you is isolation, to be outside of the camp. Apart from Jesus Christ your soul, my soul is ugly, defiled, deformed, and loathsome.

Admonitory Use

This truth especially applies to those who have not yet believed the gospel. Five times in this passage, the problem is unbelief. What if they don't *believe* Moses asked. God answers by giving signs. Dear unbelieving friend, your problem is not a lack of evidence. You have an infinite sea of evidence. Christmas is evidence of the truth of Christ. **Isaiah 7:14** "Therefore the Lord himself will give you *a sign*. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The resurrection of Christ is evidence. **Acts 17:31** "[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; *and of this he has given assurance* [a sign] to all by raising him from the dead." Your problem is not a lack of evidence. Your problem is your leprous heart. Your heart has become disfigured and deformed due to sin. Only Christ can cleanse you. But if you reject Him, you will be cast

¹⁶ Song of Solomon 2:15

out. Your disease will never be cured, but you waste away for all eternity. Cry out to Him. Jesus, Master, have mercy on me. Cleanse my leprous heart. Take away my deformity and defilement.

The scandal of Christmas

That is the scandal of Christmas. God sent His Son into the World—our Great High Priest—to heal us of our incurable disease of sin. That’s *why* we see Jesus healing lepers in the gospels. He was fulfilling the sign given to Moses. That’s what we just sang. “Lord, now indeed I find, Thy power and Thine alone, Can change the leper’s spots and melt the heart of stone.”¹⁷ That’s *why* we see Jesus being crucified *outside of the camp* because He became unclean in our place. **Matthew 8:17** “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” If you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, your leprosy has been cured. Yes you and I still sin. Yes we can’t make it past coffee on Monday morning without sinning, but we have been cured from sin’s power, and sin’s penalty. And very soon we will be *cured* from sin’s presence. That’s our **second sign**: *Christ cured you and me from the incurable disease of sin by bearing it all upon Himself.*

III. The Water and the Blood

The bloody Nile

Please look with me at v.9 “If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.” Moses would have to wait to enter Egypt to see this sign. But this was the first plague that Yahweh sent upon Egypt. It had the priority. How would the Israelites have interpreted this? What was significant about the Nile? It was where Pharaoh had killed their babies. Thousands upon thousands of baby boys were thrown into the Nile. It had become a river of blood. And

¹⁷ Jesus Paid It All

now the LORD was going to turn that very river, which the Egyptians worshipped as a god, into a river of death. The Israelites wouldn't have missed the significance of this sign. They remembered that when Cain killed Abel, God heard the cry of Abel's blood. **Genesis 4:10-11** "And the LORD said, "What have you done? *The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.*"¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'" The blood from Hebrew babies was crying out from the Nile and now God was going to curse for their sakes.¹⁸ So this sign tells the story of God avenging the innocent blood the Egyptians had spilt.

The deeper truth: the water and blood of Jesus

But there is a deeper truth for us. Dear congregation, this **third sign** is for you. All of us are just as guilty as the Egyptians. You might say "Pastor Josh I have never murdered anyone. How can you say I am just as guilty as the Egyptians?" Because Jesus said so. **Matthew 5:21-22** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." You are liable to the judgment. But dear congregation, God has rendered even this judgment—this sign—to His dear beloved Son. What happened to Jesus on the cross? He was pierced, and out came water and blood. **John 19:34** "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

God avenged our blood guilt

That's **our sign**. *God avenged our blood guilt by taking it from the side of His own Son.* "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."¹⁹ You see loved ones, **the first sign** dealt with liberating us from the serpent, **the second sign** dealt with cleansing us from the leprosy of sin. This last sign shows us *how*

¹⁸ "God's making a great destruction of the lives of a people is, in the language of the Old Testament, a giving them blood to drink. Isaiah 49:26 "I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine.'" Edwards, pg. 643

¹⁹ Hebrews 9:22

God accomplishes these things: by opening up the fountain of blood from His own Son.²⁰

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains
 Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains
 And sinner plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains²¹

The true and better Moses

God cannot free us from the serpent or cleanse our leprous spots by *mere* mercy. God is merciful indeed, but He is also just. God demanded justice for Egypt's sins and that why their river turned into blood. God demands justice for your sins, and that's why Christ's side was opened up and blood came forth. Don't you see? The Exodus, as one author put it, "is the only thing that ever happens"²² in the Bible. Christ is the true and better Moses. The blood of the Nile is a mere shadow of the boundless river of blood that is available for sinners when they come to Jesus Christ.

Christ, the true and better Moses, called to lead a people home
 Standing bold to earthly powers, God's great glory to be known
 With His arms stretched wide to heaven, see the waters part in two
 See the veil is torn for - ever, cleansed with blood we pass now through²³

Hortatory Use

²⁰ Zechariah 13:1 "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness."

²¹ There Is A Fountain

²² Morales, pg. 4

²³ Christ the True and Better

So dear congregation, receive this charge. Look at these signs and believe. Let your faith be nourished in the signs God has provided. No doubt Moses already believed before He saw these signs, but when he saw them, His faith was renewed and animated and energized. That's what these signs are meant to be for your faith. That's what the Lord's Supper is meant to do for you this morning. To nurture and feed your faith. So look at all of these signs and believe.

Look at that serpent. The True and Better Moses grabbed it by the tail and it turned into a dead stick. Satan no longer has power over your soul. "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."²⁴

Look at that leprous hand. It is now healed. Your plague has been removed. What sins do you have that are so wicked that cannot be taken away? What defilement has soiled you, what wounds have gone so deep that the Great Physician cannot heal them?

Look at that boundless river of blood. If you were pile up all your sins from youth till now, it would be like a grain of sand that would drown in that river. All the sins of all the world could not dry up that river. Let that wash over you this morning.

Look to Christ the true and better Moses and believe. He is the serpent slayer, the leper healer, the fountain of bottomless soul cleansing blood.

²⁴ Colossians 1:13