

The Rod of God

“The LORD said unto [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.”
—*Exodus 4:2*

A ROD IS USED IN THE Bible to symbolize power and authority, such as the “rod of iron” and the “rod of correction.” (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; Prov. 22:15) It is also used to

denote divine assistance to God’s people, as a rod of “comfort” and of “strength.”—Ps. 23:4; 110:2

A SPECIAL ROD

We note a very special rod that is mentioned in the Scriptures in connection with the exodus of Israel from Egypt. This rod is called the “rod of Moses,” the “rod of Aaron,” the “rod of Levi,” and most significantly it is called the “rod of God.” This rod, which was to play such an important role in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, had a very humble beginning. It was a simple shepherd’s rod which Moses used in tending the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the land of Midian.

As Moses neared the age of 80, he led the flock of Jethro to the back side of Mount Horeb, and there the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire and spoke to him out of a burning bush. He

said unto Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, ... Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” (Exod. 3:7,10) The Lord told Moses that he intended to bring this people into Canaan, a land “flowing with milk and honey.”—vs. 8

MOSES CLAIMS INADEQUACY

Moses felt inadequate to this great task and questioned Jehovah’s wisdom in choosing him to be the deliverer of Israel. The account reads: “Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.”—Exod. 4:1-4

In all, there were three signs given to Moses to show that God was with him, but here we will only consider the first one, which had to do with the rod. The rod here represents divine power and authority which was to be exercised through Moses on behalf of the children of Israel.

In this sign, we see two conditions symbolically represented that have to do with the whole human family. We know that “the sting of death is sin,” and all have “come short of the glory of God.”

(I Cor. 15:56; Rom. 3:23) The human race have all come under the effects of original sin, and thus come under the curse of God's judgments. The time is coming, though, when the greater than Moses will catch the serpent "by the tail," bind and eventually destroy Satan and thus release the human family from his beguilement.

This concerns the Lord's people inasmuch as the very purpose of their calling is that they may become part of this greater Moses that will be charged with the responsibility of delivering mankind from the bondage of sin and death during Christ's coming kingdom. These called-out ones have been begotten with God's Holy Spirit, and thus have the great responsibility to properly use this power and authority as ambassadors of the heavenly kingdom.

It is important to remember that while the Lord's people are not expected to deliver mankind or to convert the world at this present time, nevertheless we must be putting forth this message, preaching the "gospel of the kingdom ... in all the world for a witness." (Matt. 24:14) As we cast the rod down, symbolically speaking, telling the people about how that old serpent, Satan, is the god of this world, and telling them about the great time of trouble we are now in, let us be sure to lift the serpent up again "by the tail," and also tell the people about the time when their deliverance will actually take place. Pointing out the "silver lining" behind the dark clouds of trouble is indeed a most wonderful part of our ministry, especially as we know that day of deliverance is near at hand.

WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND?

The Lord is asking each one of us the question that he asked Moses, “What is that in thine hand?” If we have certain talents or abilities, if we have material possessions, if we have a knowledge of the Truth, let us remember that all of these things have been sanctified with the rod of God’s authority through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and we must use all to his praise and honor in faithful service to him. We feel inadequate at times, and so unworthy of this honor, just as Moses did. We know that in our own selves we come far short. The words of the Lord to Moses should also be a comfort to us: “The LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.”—Exod. 4:11,12

The Lord chose Aaron, Moses’ brother, to be his mouthpiece before the people, particularly at the time of their deliverance. “He [Aaron] shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.” (vss. 16,17) In these verses, we see Moses representing God and Aaron the Lord Jesus, the “Word” of God. (John 1:14; Rev. 19:1-13) We, too, as the footstep followers of Jesus, have been charged with the responsibility of speaking the words of the Father as faithful “ambassadors” of the heavenly kingdom.—II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20

In Exodus 4:17, quoted above, the Lord particularly pointed out the fact that this rod had been sanctified for use by Moses and Aaron in giving signs related to the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. So now, this simple shepherd's rod had become the "rod of God," as indicated in verse 20: "Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand." We notice in verse 21 that Moses was to use this rod and perform certain signs before Pharaoh. "And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go."

SIGNS PRIMARILY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

The primary purpose of these signs was to convince the children of Israel that Moses was appointed by God to be their deliverer. This is made plain in Exodus 4:5 where it says that Moses would perform these signs "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers" had sent Moses unto them. This is further emphasized in the last few verses of the chapter. "The LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in

the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.”—vss. 27-31

Our Lord Jesus, during his three-and-one-half year ministry, performed many signs and, as a result, many people believed and followed him. He always claimed that the words he spoke were not his words, but the words of the Father which sent him, that the power to perform miracles was not his power, but power from on high.—John 14:10

We see in the broad sense how the people of Israel dwelling in the land of Goshen in Egypt picture the church, the spiritual Israelites, dwelling in the world, symbolic Egypt, yet separate from the world, awaiting their glorious deliverance in the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:6) As we look about us now, we are beholding the mighty hand of God and the exercising of his rod of supervision in world affairs. We see prophecies being fulfilled. We see many signs and believe that the kingdom is very near.

We read, “The people believed and ... they bowed their heads and worshipped.” (Exod. 4:31) Concerning spiritual Israel of our day, Jesus said, when you see these signs—these things coming to pass—“lift up your heads, for your redemption [deliverance] draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:28) This is indeed a grand and glorious time to be living, and surely the Lord’s people do rejoice as they contemplate the nearness of the time for their deliverance and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.

GOD'S MIGHTY HAND TODAY

The mighty hand of God that we see exercised in the earth today brings great rejoicing to his true people, realizing that it points to the nearness of their deliverance from "Egypt"—the world. We see, too, that the same signs are being manifested to the pharaohs of our day—the kings, presidents, and dictators—the world leaders of the present time. Their reaction, though, is that of disbelief. Their hearts are hardened, and they refuse to believe that the Lord's hand is being made manifest in the affairs of men.

In Revelation 2:27, the resurrected Lord spoke of the "rod of iron" that would be used to bring about the total destruction of this present evil order of things. This overthrow of Satan was shown in the ten plagues of Egypt which were accomplished by the stretching forth of the hand of Moses with the rod of God. Exodus chapters 7-12 record the details of each of these plagues.

ROD USED AT THE RED SEA

Let us now project our minds a little farther ahead where we see the children of Israel gathered at the Red Sea. The last plague—the death of the firstborn—was too much for Pharaoh to bear and he hastened to send the Israelites out of the land. However, no sooner had he let them go than he had a change of heart again and sent his armies in pursuit. This is the picture we have set before us in the 14th chapter of Exodus: Israel, perhaps two to three million of them, are at the Red Sea, which blocks their escape, and Pharaoh's army is about to overtake them. The Israelites complained against

Moses, to which he responded: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me: speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”—Exod. 14:13-16

There will be times in our lives when we will have severe trials and testing along this line. Satan will pursue and try to destroy us, but our guardian angels will intervene. When the world and its distractions, cares, and problems seem to press in about us and we become fearful and discouraged, let us bring to mind the words of Moses to the children of Israel: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD,” and he “shall fight for you and ye shall hold your peace.” God will never leave nor forsake us, and he will be “a very present help in trouble.”—Heb. 13:5; Ps. 46:1

Moses lifted up the rod and stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters were divided and the people passed over. The rod of God’s Spirit and power overruling in our lives will indeed also bring about our deliverance from every trial. “You have been put to no test but such as is common to man: and God is true, who will not let any test come on you which you are not able to undergo; but he will make with the test a way out of it, so that you may be able to go through it.”—I Cor. 10:13, *Bible in Basic English*

Sometimes, in order to bring us through a trial, perhaps one that we have brought on by our own bad judgment, the Lord has to use his rod of correction and teaching. In Job 9:34, we have this spoken of, and Job asked that this “rod” be taken from him. We, however, should not resist this rod of discipline, as it is for our eternal good and is being administered by the hands of a loving God who is deeply concerned with our welfare. Let us have the faith of Job, when he later said: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”—Job 13:15

ROD USED TO OBTAIN WATER

In Exodus 17, we find that Moses and the children of Israel have crossed over the Red Sea and are approaching unto Mount Horeb, which is Sinai, and near to the place where God first spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. We find that by now the Israelites had grown very rebellious against Moses because of the hardships they were faced with, in particular the shortage of water to drink.

“Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel,

and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?”—Exod. 17:4-7

We do not believe that the Lord’s true people should be equated with these rebellious and unappreciative Israelites, and yet, there may be times in our lives when we murmur and complain, not placing our trust and confidence fully in the Lord. The Israelites seemed to quickly forget how God had blessed them and carried them through in every difficulty. Their faith was very shallow. Let us never forget the manner in which the Lord has kept us and led us in the past, indeed, up to this very moment. He is a faithful God and will never forsake us, even though we may sometimes stray from him. In this picture, we see that the rod of God has smitten the rock of Christ. (I Cor. 10:1-4) As a result of his sacrifice, living waters are pouring forth for our refreshing, for our nourishment and our salvation. Let us drink of the water of Truth daily, always rejoicing and thanking God for this provision of his love.

HOLDING UP THE ROD OF TRUTH

We now see yet another experience of Israel related to the “rod of God.” In subsequent verses of Exodus 17 is an account of one of the heathen kings who sought to make war with Israel as they passed near his land. “Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up

to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."—Exod. 17:8-13

The Christian warfare is indeed difficult, and we know that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. (II Cor. 10:4,5) Our success in battle depends upon our faithful use of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. 6:17) Let us hold it high, always having the banner of the word of Truth before us. If we do not hold the Truth high, it may soon drag on the ground and we may even trample it underfoot, and we will surely lose the battle. We all have the individual battleground of our flesh, and daily we must bring it into subjection, using the rod of the Lord as our weapon against the flesh and its weaknesses. Let us, therefore, hold the rod of Truth high and use it properly in our lives.

Additionally, just as Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses, so we all have the privilege of holding up the hands and assisting those more active in the ministry. We do this through prayer, temporal support, and particularly in the many little ways that may be opened to us to assist and encourage others in the Lord's vineyard. A word of encouragement, of thanks, an expression of love and appreciation could be far more important than we may at

first realize. Let us not neglect this important service. Let us also not become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) We must continue to hold up the rod of Truth, even as Moses did, unto the “going down of the sun,” until the last member of the body of Christ passes beyond the veil.

THE ROD BUDS AND BLOSSOMS

The next significant use of the rod of Moses and Aaron is recorded in Numbers chapter 17. The children of Israel had begun to complain because they felt Moses and Aaron had usurped too much authority. There was considerable jealousy on the part of the other tribal leaders, so the Lord spoke to Moses and told him to have each tribe of Israel provide a rod, twelve rods in all. Aaron’s rod was among them for the house of Levi, his tribe. Moses laid the rods before the Lord in the Tabernacle. The next day Moses went in and brought the rods out of the Tabernacle, and the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had budded, and blossomed, and brought forth almonds. This was a sign that God had chosen Aaron to administer the ecclesiastical affairs of the people as their High Priest. Then Aaron’s rod was taken in again to the Tabernacle and placed in the Ark of the Covenant as an everlasting token against the rebels.—vss. 1-10; Heb. 9:1-4

There is a lesson which applies to us and to all the church during this Gospel Age. If we are using the rod of the Lord properly in our Christian lives it will bring forth fruitage unto the glory of God. However, we should not expect to do great things all at once so far as our Christian development is concerned. First, there is only the small beginning

of progress represented in the bud. Sometimes in our life that bud is quenched, pinched off and not permitted to go on to blossom and fruition. However, the Lord patiently works with each one of us, giving us experiences that are best calculated to provide fertile ground for bringing forth these little buds for a long time, and then gradually this new Christ-like character begins to blossom out in great beauty so that it is seen by others. These beautiful blossoms of character exude a sweet odor that is a blessing to all others about them. Finally, these beautiful qualities of character are brought to fruition through "good works." (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:13,14) This fruitage in our Christian life is treasure laid up in heaven where "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt."—Matt. 6:20

With Aaron's rod there were buds, blossoms, and fruitage all at the same time. So it is with the Lord's people now in the gradual development of the Christian character in all of its many elements. There will be the buds, the blossoms, and the fruitage all appearing, but as we progress along the Christian way the buds turn into blossoms and fruit, so that by the time we reach the end of our course there will not be so many buds, but an abundance of fruitage unto the praise and glory of our Lord. (John 15:5,8) Let us also remember that the development of these glorious characters will not be because of our own ability, our own might or power, but only because of the rod of God's spirit that dwells with us. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."—Zech. 4:6

THE ROD OF GOD USED IMPROPERLY

There is another mention of the rod of God in the experiences of Israel, where we read, “The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.”—Num. 20:7-13

This smiting of the rock was near the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It seems that the people had not changed much, for they were still complaining against Moses and the Lord. Moses, being provoked to anger by the people, smote the rock twice, rather than speaking to it as God had instructed, and water came out abundantly. Because Moses and Aaron tempted the Lord by striking the rock twice in disobedience, they were not permitted to lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan.

This would seem to be a rather harsh punishment inflicted upon Moses and Aaron, and yet the Lord was giving a very important lesson to us, and to all those who have been in a relationship with him during this Gospel Age. Jesus, in his temptations in the wilderness, quoted a commandment of the Lord to the Devil, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” (Matt. 4:7) Surely there is no real danger of our tempting the Lord in any big or spectacular way, but there are innumerable ways we may tempt God unwittingly, or in little things, because we are not as careful as we should be in the application of the principles of Truth to our lives. Perhaps these are a few of the ways such tempting may be done: by arbitrarily staying away from meetings, assuming the Lord will overlook it; by not studying the Scriptures, expecting God to give us a blessing while not properly preparing ourselves for it; by foolish conduct before the world; by not using the means at hand for properly treating our physical illnesses, and tempting the Lord to help us but not willing to do what we can for ourselves.

To avoid the sin of tempting God it is important that we very diligently apply the principles of Truth to our daily lives, having our conscience properly instructed by his word, and allowing this conscience to judge carefully even in the very smallest matters as to our conduct and attitudes.

ROD AND STAFF IS ALL THAT IS NEEDED

The 9th verse of Numbers 20 indicates that Moses took the rod of God—Aaron’s rod, which was Moses’ own original rod—out of the Ark of the Covenant to smite the rock for water. It was later put back

into the ark and was there when the children of Israel passed through the waters of the Jordan and into Canaan. Little did Moses know when he was shepherding the flocks of Jethro down in Midian that this rod would play such an important and honorable role in the great work of delivering the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and bringing them safely to the land that flowed with milk and honey.

Now we understand what our Lord Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, take “no scrip, no bread, no money,” only your staff—walking stick or rod. (Mark 6:8) We can take nothing of this world into the kingdom, but the proper use of the rod and staff of the Lord can and will get us there. The rod of God must go with us all the way into the kingdom. ■