

The Sign of Our Faith

Happy Sabbath to all.

Tonight I would like to speak about a subject that's come up as a Church a couple times in the past, and so I thought it would be good if we did a formal study on it. I was reminded of it this past week during a conversation with Giselle's parents. We had a short, but good, conversation on the subject of asking for signs, and I think we came to a good understanding that is worth sharing with the Church as a whole. This study is not to be understood as a rebuke to any particular misinterpretation, but rather something that we have concluded after prayer and discussion.

For those who do not fully know the character of Yah, the Bible may appear to present something of a mixed method with regard to divination, or the practice of attempting to predict events without prior knowledge. One can find passages where it is forbidden, where it is potentially displayed in a positive light, and where it simply passes with no comment. Here is an example of each:

“There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.” (Deu 18:10, 11)

“And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, ‘What shall we do to the ark of Yahweh [that was captured from Israel in battle]? Tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.’ [And they said] ‘And take the ark of Yahweh, and lay it upon the cart, and put the jewels of gold, which ye return Him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go.’ And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.” (1 Sam 6:2, 8, 10, 12)

“And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house, for he was yet there; and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said unto them, ‘What deed is this that ye have done? Wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?’” (Gen 44:14, 15)

In the Deuteronomy passage, the Scriptures clearly tell us that divination is not to be known among the holy people. In the second, the Philistine diviners appeared to determine the will of Yahweh, even though they were not men of Israel. In the third, Joseph, who is described as being faithful to Yah, boasts to his brothers that he is able to determine the truth, even if it is hidden from other individuals.

The issue can be made even further clouded if the individual reading these passages does not have a clear idea of the difference between divination and prophecy. I will speak about that in a moment.

It should be clear, however, that with regard to the passages above, we have a way of determining Yah's will for the saints. As we have seen in previous studies, there is a hierarchy, or an order, in drawing truth from the Scriptures. Divine commands are the clearest expression of truth. If Yah says, “Thou shalt not kill,” or “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy,” then – in the absence of deception or corrupt traditions – the meaning of these passages is clear. Other verses may expand the application of these things, such as defending one's self against an attacker in one's home at night, or emergency activities during Sabbath hours, but the principle will hold true in every case.

Then there are doctrinal discourses, where one individual is teaching another about spiritual things. Then there are prophecies and parables, symbolic passages, and so on. In the three cases above, the clear instruction from Yahweh is to avoid these practices. When, therefore, we see the other verses in light of this, the teaching becomes clearer.

The Philistines were working to protect themselves, not to serve Yah, and He merely used their unsanctified methods (as He did with the armies of Babylon in other books) to accomplish His ends. This is not a sanction to the methods of the Philistines, any more than it is approval of their religion as a whole.

Similarly, Joseph was already deceiving his brothers, giving them the impression that he was a grand Egyptian noble. It would be reasonable, then, for him to merely adopt the style of speech, and the mannerisms, that might be expected of pagan dignitaries. There is certainly no passage that describes Joseph actually practicing divination, but his intention – intimidating his brothers – was accomplished. We could, perhaps, discuss the issue of Joseph's deception of his brothers in the first place, but that is another study.

Clearly, the Bible records the deeds, and the misdeeds, of its subjects, and does not always give commentary on the righteousness or unrighteousness of those acts. It is, therefore, unsafe for us to attempt to draw doctrine from the mere actions of individuals of the Bible, from either Testament, without first seeking out the commands and the doctrinal discourses to give us a foundation for our examination.

Now, as I mentioned, for those unfamiliar with the Scriptures, divination can be confused with prophecy. They might say, "Yahweh has servants that know things without an obvious way of doing so, and can predict the future. Why does he forbid these practices in one place, and yet hold up the prophets as examples in others?"

This manner of thinking is largely due to a misunderstanding of what "prophecy" IS. Prophecy is not, fundamentally, the act of predicting the future, or knowing events without any apparent evidence. The word "prophecy," according to Gesenius' Lexicon, comes from a root word in Hebrew meaning "to cause to bubble up," and is a symbolic reference to the way that words can come forth in a flow from a speaker. It also appears to be related to a word meaning "to show," or "to declare."

At its most basic level, then, the term "prophecy" means the act of speaking. Specifically, in a Biblical context, it is the revealing of Yah's will by declaring it openly.

Now, this CAN involve predicting the future, because Yah has absolute foreknowledge. (Isa 46:10, 1John 3:20, Acts 2:23, etc.) It can involve speaking present truths unknown to the hearers, because Yah is aware of all that exists, even "the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb 4:12)

The prophet, then, is not depending on any internal knowledge or skill. He does not have "hidden knowledge" from which he draws forth his words. He does not communicate with unclean spirits in order to learn secrets. The prophet is in communion with the Almighty, and speaks His will at His command.

But the difference between prophecy and divination is not merely a matter of the source of the knowledge either. Yah's knowledge is given to mankind in infinite love, and with infinite wisdom. If we know something from Him, we benefit by knowing it. We are blessed by knowing it, and our souls are drawn

closer to Heaven. Of course, like all knowledge, it can be misused for harm, but those who receive it with faith are always edified.

Divination, on the other hand, is gained through selfishness. Consider, the Philistines were being plagued by the Ark of the Covenant, and their predictions were only what they determined was best to free them from the trouble as quickly and completely as possible. Those who seek out diviners do so in order to benefit themselves, generally in the short-term. The intent of the knowledge, therefore, is also different from the things that are revealed through genuine prophecy.

We ought to be cautious, therefore. Asking for signs, if we are not spiritually discerning, can become very similar to divination. Let's look at three cases of what might potentially be seen as "grey areas" with regard to a sign from Yah or a divination practice:

"And Gideon said unto Elohim, 'If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.' And it was so, for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water." (Judges 6:36-38)

"And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for Yahweh, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which Yahweh's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering." (Lev 16:8, 9)

"And [the apostles] appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.'" (Acts 1:23-26)

Now, in the first case, with Gideon, Yahweh had already said what He intended to do. Gideon reminded Him, saying, "as thou hast said." In Judges 6:14, earlier in the chapter that I quoted, we read, "And Yahweh looked upon him, and said, 'Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?'"

Yah was not revealing any new information by Gideon's sign, merely confirming (to one who had grown up in an Israel in bondage to heathens) that His promise was to be trusted.

In the second case, Aaron was not attempting to determine which was the "correct" goat, only which one would be used symbolically one way rather than the other. Both goats used in the Day of Atonement ceremony are to be without flaw, thus for all intents and purposes they are identical. Again, no actual information (new or otherwise) is revealed by the casting of lots in this ritual enactment of cleansing.

In the third case, where the apostles cast lots to determine which of the two nominees would replace Judas as one of the twelve, we never actually receive any divine confirmation that they made the right choice. We read what the apostles did, but nothing is ever written of either Matthias or this Joseph again.

So, what can we conclude from these three Biblical witnesses?

What these verses tell me is that asking for signs is never a reliable means of telling Yah's will. Even if we do not consider whether it is spiritually sound or not, the fact of the matter is that Yah does not seem to honor it very often, if at all. He does not seem to desire to speak to us in that way, and if we ask for signs, and they do confirm Yah's promises – those promises were given to us anyway.

When speaking with His friends, if you recall the testimony of Elijah's life, it is not with earthquakes or fire, but with a still, small voice – the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Yah may provide us with signs of His own making. He may reveal His authority, His power, and His intentions through miraculous workings, but I can't think of an example in the Bible in which a human has asked for a sign from Yah and received previously unknown, unsuspected, information that was actually useful.

The miracles that were worked by Moses and Yahshua, which are among the most impressive in the Scriptural record, all occurred at two critical points in spiritual history. They were given to reveal the power of Yah at times of tremendous change. The Israelites were marching to freedom from Egyptian bondage. The early New Testament believers were breaking away from the bondage that had corrupted the religion of the Sadducees and Pharisees. Yah's people, few and small, were standing against great traditions, and tremendous (or so it seemed) spiritual authority. The miracles of Yah's messengers revealed that He was the true Power, and this is why, in the very last days, Yah's appearance will be with power and great glory. When the last wicked governments of human and demonic devising are cast aside, to be replaced by that Kingdom which shall never fade away, the universe will be filled with the glory of our Father, and none shall speak against it.

But until that time, we – Yah's friends – we listen to that still, small voice. This does not mean, of course, that there will be no times of uncertainty. This does not mean that the way will always be clear and lit before us. The uncertainty of our mortal progress is what drive some to seek knowledge that has not yet been revealed. Naturally, there is nothing wrong with desiring to know. We all are encouraged to seek wisdom, and light, and clarity. What we must do, as members of Yah's final called-out people, who are prepared by Him to show the universe what His character looks like in human flesh, is ensure that our methods of doing so are both praiseworthy and effective.

Casting lots, or asking for signs in general, is not something that the Scriptures declare to be "evil" or corrupt, particularly if done prayerfully. However, there is no particular evidence that Yah actually responds to these methods, which should tell us that He desires us to seek another way. Again, we want our methods to be effective. What is instructed to Yah's people seeking wisdom, well, there are two things, and they can be shared very simply, because they are direct, divine instructions, which no doctrine, no prophecy, and no interpretation, can dismiss. Here is the first:

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard [of your love for us], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;" (Col 1:9)

Here is the second:

"Where no counsel is, the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." (Pro 11:14)

This is repeated here, “A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength, for by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war, and in multitude of counsellors [there is] safety.” (Pro 24:5, 6)

The Scriptures reveal to Yah’s people those things that are good. They also, for those who have spiritual discernment, indicate what is “best.” As members of the Church of the 144,000, it is our responsibility, before Heaven and earth, to seek out and perform what is “best.” Last week, I spoke about overcoming fear through love, prayer and communication. This week, the solution is the same. As revealed by those verses we just saw, the best way to overcome uncertainty, doubt, and lack of knowledge is by means of love, prayer and communication.

The gentle voice of the Holy Spirit is among Yah’s people. The ignorant and sin-loving do not know this, but we know this, for it is written, (as Yahshua confronted His temptations with the Word) “[Yahweh] in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways; nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts 14:16, 17)

Yah has given His people good things as a witness of His presence; He has never left His people without sure knowledge of His presence with them. He has given us the avenue of prayer, by which we may lay our desires before Him, and the Body of His Son, the Church of Yahshua, as a living witness to the world, with counselors that will (as we communicate with divine effectiveness) allow us to bear one another’s burdens, and be the edifying, comforting, and encouraging family that Yah intends for us. This is the sign of our faith, greater than any strange sight or unusual event.

Let us believe the promises that our Father has given to us. We will be blessed. We will be healthy, and holy, and whole.