

The Finger of God

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The phrase “finger of God” comes from the pen of Luke and the lips of the Savior. The phrase is found only once in the New Testament (Luke 11:20). It is an anthropomorphism relating the power and work of God through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament background for this phrase provides the context for its use by the Lord. Jesus said, “But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.” First, consideration will be given to the Old Testament context. Then, the immediate context of the statement will be studied.

Old Testament Background

Three epoch events in the Old Testament include reference to the phrase “finger of God” or “thy fingers.” They are the creation, deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

The creation was accomplished by the power of God. “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained” (Psa. 8:3). The Psalmist affirms that God is the ultimate craftsman. First, God conceives the various aspects of creation. Thus, He manifests His divine wisdom. Second, He crafts the creation. Thus, He shows His ability to design. Third, He creates. Thus, He demonstrates His mighty power. Nothing compares to this power! God creates by divine fiat. “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa. 33:8,9). All things were created by God through Jesus Christ. God was the direct agent and Jesus was the indirect agent (John 1:1-3; Eph. 3:9).

The deliverance from Egyptian bondage was wrought by the power of God. God brought ten plagues against Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt. The plagues were designed to show the superiority of Israel's God to the gods of Egypt. They were for the purpose of humbling Pharaoh before the one true God. The first two plagues, water to blood (Exodus 7:2) and frogs (Exodus 8:7) were duplicated by the sorcery of the magicians of Egypt. However, the third plague (dust to lice—Exodus 8:17) proved different. “Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them, as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:19). The magicians of Egypt could not duplicate the third plague or any of the subsequent plagues. When these men realized that the plagues were not tricks, they said, “this is the finger of God.” God's power was real! Their power was not real. After the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh permitted the children of Israel to depart Egypt. God had freed His people through a mighty demonstration of His power. The Passover was commemorated in Israel yearly. The event was never forgotten! Just like the creation, the *finger of God* marked a historical event that has never faded from the memory of man.

The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai was a manifestation of God's power and authority. In Exodus 31:18, Moses wrote, “And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” The giving of the Law to Israel at Sinai was marked by the phrase “finger of God.” The Law was given as an act of God by the authority of God. All of the children of Israel viewed this as a sacred event. It was forever etched in their memory. The stone tablets were placed in the Ark of the Covenant, a most sacred place, to be kept for future generations. The Law shaped Israel into a theocratic nation. The covenant bound God and the people together. God held the Israelites accountable to His laws.

These three events were notable historical events in Israel. All devout Jews in Jesus' day would have known of these epoch events that shaped Israel's history and national character. When Jesus used the phrase "finger of God" to identify His work and ministry, He was showing that His work: (1) showed the formative power of God; and (2) was a direct and immediate act of God.

The Context of Luke 11:20

In Luke 11:20, Jesus refutes the charge by unbelieving Jews that He was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (a reference to Satan). He masterfully argues that Satan would not cast out Satan. He states, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth" (Luke 11:17). If Jesus cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub, then Satan was fighting against Satan. The result of this internal conflict would be complete desolation of Satan's kingdom. Then Jesus said, "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20). There are several features of this statement worth considering. First, the word "but" is an adversative conjunction. It denotes contradistinction. Jesus is making a contrast to the previous verse (verse 19). He affirms that He is casting out devils by the power of God. He uses this unique phrase, "the finger of God" which is full of the rich history found in the Old Testament events noted earlier. The force of this phrase on the Jewish mind could not be missed. Second, the sentence is composed in a first class conditional statement. The first class conditional statement is the statement of reality. The "if" indicates reality—*since it is a fact*. It does not indicate potential or "doubt." Jesus is stating a fact about the origin of the power by which the devils are cast out. Third, the preposition *en* translated *with* is instrumental and indicates means. "With the finger of God" shows by what means Jesus demonstrated power over Satan's

kingdom. The phrase clearly encompasses those historical moments when God's power was demonstrated: creation, deliverance from Egyptian bondage and the giving of the Law at Sinai. No upright Jew could deny these events and, now, Jesus was connecting His ministry and work with the same power that had accomplished them. Matthew's account of this event states that Jesus cast out devils by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28). The Godhead was active in Jesus' earthly ministry and miraculous work. Fourth, the conclusion drawn by Jesus was "no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." The miracles were demonstrations of God's power. Jesus possessed this power by virtue of the fact that He was deity. God was working just as He had in creation, in the liberation of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage and in giving the Law on Sinai. The authority of God was manifest in these events. The kingdom of God (the church) would not be established fully until Pentecost (Acts 2). However, Jesus was already showing His power over Satan in these miraculous events. Jesus would go on to triumph over sin and death through the cross and His resurrection. By these events, Satan received a crushing blow (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:14; I John 3:8). The power to overcome and defeat Satan belongs to Christ. The kingdom of God was "at hand." It was even then breaking in through these mighty demonstrations of God's power. Marshall states, "What is of significance is surely the addition *ep' humas* (*ephthasen ep' humas—has come upon you*, DS); the point is that the kingly and saving power of God has drawn near to the hearers and is there for them to grasp; and the proof that it is near to them is that its power has been evidenced in the lives of other people, namely the exorcisms" (I. Howard Marshall, NIGTC, *The Gospel of Luke*, 476). The rule of God is present in the person of Jesus Christ. Luke's audience must grasp the significance of this new historical moment and interpret it in light of the past historical epochs so closely connected by the phrase "the finger of God." Only then will they realize that through Jesus Christ they can

become a new spiritual creation (we are His workmanship, Eph. 2:10), be redeemed by the blood of Christ and delivered from the captivity of sin, (John 8:32-36), and fashioned into a new nation under His rule—the kingdom of God—(John 3:3,5; Heb. 8:8-13).