

CHAPTER 15

THE ONLY MIRACLE PROMISED

VATICINIUM EX EVENTU

The hot-gospeler and the Bible-thumper does not tire of quoting statements, alleged to have been made by Jesus, that he was going to Jerusalem to die, and on the third day he would come back to life. The Gospels, any Christian scholar will confirm, were first penned decades and centuries after Jesus. In his lifetime, not a word was written, nor did he instruct anyone to write a word! Taylor in his commentary on the Gospel of St. Mark, page 437, discounts the so-called prophecies regarding the "crucifixion" as *vaticinium ex eventu* meaning "prophecy after the event". That the Gospel writers fabricated words and sayings, and put them into the mouth of Jesus, as if he had foretold the happenings.

The Christian missionary, the evangelist, the crusader, is reluctant to give a hearing to any Christian scholar despite the latter's sincerity or greatness of calibre — whether Taylor, or Schweitzer, or Brandon or Anderson he may be. As soon as they say a word which goes against their pet prejudice, they will discount them all as "external source" and "minority 20th-century speculation". Therefore, I am constrained here to catch the proverbial "Bull by the Horn" and take him to the drinking trough.

DEMAND FOR A MIRACLE

The Jews had murmured in the wilderness against Moses (pbuh). They had given him endless trouble, and now his successor, the Messiah is given no lesser parrying. In their bouts of harassing questionings, they come to him, now, sounding most respectable and polite:

"Master, (Hebrew — Rabbi, meaning Teacher) we would have a sign of thee"

(HOLY BIBLE) *Matthew 12:38*

All his teaching and preaching, and healing were not enough to convince the Jews that he was a man sent by God; that he was their Messiah. Now they are asking for a "SIGN" — a Miracle — such as

CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCI-FICTION

flying like a bird, or walking on water; in short, anything they considered IMPOSSIBLE.

Before you proceed any further in the discussion with the Christian, please make sure that he understands the word "sign" in the above verse to mean a "miracle". This simple English word from the King James Version of the Bible, which every other Version seems to have copied is creating difficulty in the grasping of its true significance. In the "New International Version", supported by Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed churches, the word is expanded as "miraculous sign", thank God! Not just any sign, or road signs — "Stop, Yield or Go!"

It is also necessary for us to try and define what is meant by a miracle. One of the simplest and truest of definitions is that given by Dr. Lyttelton in, "The Place of Miracles in Religion", that is:-

"AN ACT BEYOND HUMAN POWER."

This is exactly what the Jews wanted from Jesus. An act which they, the Scribes and the Pharisees, could not duplicate. On the face of it the request seems quite fair, but it is a sick mentality which craves for "tricks" which every sceptic and materialist can rationalise.

NO "SIGN" BUT ONE!

So Jesus reacts:

". . . An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign (miracle), and there shall no sign (miracle) be given to it, but the sign (miracle) of the prophet, Jonah."

(HOLY BIBLE) *Matthew 12:39*

What was the "sign" or the miracle that Jonah performed that Jesus now proposes to emulate? To discover this miracle, we have to go to the "Book of Jonah", in the Bible. But this "Book" is very elusive! it happens to be a single leaf, with four short chapters, and is difficult to find in any encyclopedia of a thousand pages, such as the Christian Bible. But you do not have to go to the Book itself. Every Christian child who ever attended Sunday-school, knows the whole story.

BACKGROUND TO THE "SIGN"

CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCI-FICTION

To refresh your memory, let me tell you that God Almighty commands Jonah (pbuh) to go to Nineveh (a city of a hundred thousand people) and warn them to "repent in sack-cloth and in ashes". That is, to humble themselves before the Lord, or God will destroy them.

Jonah feels despondent, fearing that the materialistic Ninevites will not listen to him; they will make a mockery of him. So instead of going to Nineveh, he goes to Joppa and sets sail to Tarshish. At sea there is a terrible storm and, according to the superstition of the mariners, whoever runs away from his "Master's Commands" creates such a turmoil at sea. An enquiry begins and Jonah realises that he is the guilty party, that as a prophet of God, he was the soldier of God. And as a soldier of God he had to obey the Commands of God. He had no right to act presumptuously. So he volunteers and makes a manly comeback. He feared that God was after his blood, and in wanting to kill him. He will sink the boat, and innocent people will die. Jonah reasons, that it will be better for him to be thrown overboard, and thus avert the disaster overtaking them.

CASTING OF LOTS

These "pre-exilic"¹ people, eight centuries before Christ had more sense of Justice and fairplay than modern civilised (?) man. They felt that Jonah wanted to commit suicide, and perhaps wanted their helping-hand. They were not going to aid and abet in his folly. So they said that they had a system of their own, to discover right from wrong, by casting "lots", something like our tossing of the coin – "head or tail"! And according to their primitive system the lot fell against Jonah, who was discovered as being the guilty man. So they took him and threw him overboard!

¹. Before the Jews were carried away into exile under Nebuchadnezzar.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

The question arises that, when they threw Jonah overboard, was he dead or was he alive? To make it easy for you to get the right answer, let me help you by suggesting that Jonah had volunteered; when he said:

" . . . Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm for you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCI-FICTION

(HOLY BIBLE) *Jonah 1:12*

When a man volunteers, one does not have to strangle him before throwing him; one does not have to spear him before throwing him; one does not have to twist his arms or legs before throwing him. Everyone agrees that that is so.

Now once more the question: Was Jonah **dead or alive** when he was thrown into the raging sea? We get a unanimous reply — that he was **ALIVE!** The storm subsides, perhaps it was a coincidence. A fish comes and swallows him. Was he **dead or alive?** And again everyone says **ALIVE!** From the fishes belly he prays to God for help. Do dead men pray? "No!" So he was ,.. **ALIVE!** On the third day the fish vomits him onto the seashore — **dead or alive?** And the reply again is **ALIVE!** It is a miracle of miracles! The Jews say that he was **ALIVE!** The Christians say that he was **ALIVE!** And the Muslims say that he was **ALIVE!** Little wonder that Jesus chose the "SIGN" (miracle) of Jonah as his only "SIGN" (miracle): ¹ Something on which the followers of three major religions are agreed.

Let me recapitulate this Mighty Miracle from the Book of Jonah:

1. When you throw a man into a raging sea, he ought to die. Because Jonah did not die, therefore, it is a MIRACLE!
2. A fish comes and gobbles the man; he ought to die. He did not die. It is now therefore, a double MIRACLE!
3. Because of heat and suffocation in the whale's belly for three days and three nights, he ought to die. He did not die, therefore, it is now a miracle of MIRACLES!

When you expect a man to die, and he does **not** die, only then is it a MIRACLE. If a man faces a firing squad and six bullets are pumped into his body at the given signal, and the man dies. Is it a miracle? "No!" But if he lives to laugh it off, would that be a miracle? Of course it would be a MIRACLE. We expected Jonah to die each time, but he does not die; therefore, his is a multiple MIRACLE.

¹. For a detailed explanation, see ["What was the Sign of Jonah?"](#)

JESUS LIKE JONAH

Jesus too, after the ordeal he is supposed to have gone through, ought to die. If he died it would be no miracle. But if he lived, as

CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCI-FICTION

he had himself foretold, and proved "according to the scriptures", it would be a "sign" — a MIRACLE! And these are his words:

. . . "For as Jonah was . . ." (English), "Want soos Jonah . . ." (Afrikaans), "Ngokuba njengo Jonah . . ." (Zulu).

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the son of man be . . ."—

(*Matthew 12:40*). How was Jonah in the whale's belly for three days and three nights — **Dead or Alive?** The Muslims, the Christians and the Jews again give a unanimous verdict of **A-L-1-V-E!** How was Jesus in the tomb, for the same period of time — **Dead or Alive?** Over a thousand million Christians, of every church or Denomination give a unanimous verdict of **D-E-A-D!** Is that **like** Jonah or **un-like** Jonah in your language? And everyone whose mind is not confused, says that, that is very **UN-LIKE** Jonah. Jesus said that he would be "**LIKE JONAH**" and his infatuated followers say that he was "**UN-LIKE JONAH!**". Who is lying — Jesus or his followers? I leave the answer to you!

BIG BUSINESS

But religion is good business. In the name of Christ they are making a mint of it. The crusaders say that we have got it all wrong. They say it was the time factor that Jesus was prophesying about, and not whether he would be Dead or Alive. They say, "Can't you see that he is emphasising the time factor? He repeats the word, "**three**", four times." These are drowning men clutching at straws, drowning women do the same! What did Jesus say?

*"For as Jonah was **THREE** days and **THREE** nights in the whale's belly; so shall the son of man be **THREE** days and **THREE** nights in the heart of the earth."*

(HOLY BIBLE) *Matthew 12:40*

Jesus was nowhere near the "**heart of the *earth***"; he was supposed to have been in a tomb, which is well-above ground-level. Maybe he was speaking figuratively.

Three and three are no doubt repeated four times, but there is nothing miraculous about a time factor. The Jews were asking Jesus for a "**sign**" — a miracle and there is nothing to make **THREE** days, or **THREE** weeks or **THREE** months into a miracle. The first time

CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCI-FICTION

when I went to Cape Town from Durban, thirty years ago, was by train, and the train took exactly THREE days and THREE nights to reach there. Hooray! It's a Miracle! Nonsense you will say, and I am forced to agree.

But it is not so easy for the Christian to agree because his salvation hangs upon a thread. Therefore he must hold on for dear life. We can afford to be charitable. So let us humour him! So was it the time factor that Jesus was out to fulfil? "Yes!" Says the Christian. When was he "crucified"¹? The bulk of Christendom believes that it was on a Friday afternoon some two thousand years ago.

¹. "Crucified": The wisdom of the inverted commas will become apparent when you read the chapter "Crucified or Cruciplayed?" later on.