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The Sign of Jonah.

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JESUS in this context is answering the request for a sign made by His hearers. There is, therefore, no necessity for discussing the authenticity or genuineness of the Book of Jonah. Such questions were not discussed outside of the Rabbinic schools. Jesus, as far as our records inform us, never discussed these topics in public or private. We have no evidence that He gave His apostles any instruction upon them. In view of this, the stress laid upon the allusion to Jonah is certainly unfair, if not unscholarly.

This paper will discuss this passage from the following view-points:—(1) The relations of the thought of this passage to the Book of Jonah; (2) its relation to the other teachings of this Gospel;

(3) to the record of this same discourse in Luke's narrative; (4) to the teaching of the other New Testament books.

1. Expositors agree in believing that the 'fish-experience' of Jonah is his sign, and that 'the burial' of Jesus is the sign of the Son of Man. If this be correct, then there is a significant contrast between the teaching of Matt. xii. 40 and the Book of Jonah. The latter never designates the 'fish-experience' of the prophet as 'the,' or 'a,' sign of Jonah. We have no evidence that Jonah ever related his experience to the Ninevites, or that they ever heard of it from any other source. This being so, we have no reason for believing that the preservation of the prophet was a sign to

the heathen who heard him speak. The Book of Jonah gives us no grounds for believing that he gave them, in connexion with his preaching, any kind of sign.¹ The *preservation*, or deliverance, of Jonah could not be *the sign*, which *he* gave to the Ninevites; for no one seems to have been a witness of either the swallowing or of the out-throwing of the prophet; and the incident occurred some time before he started on his journey towards Nineveh, and a very long distance from this city. His experience was not designed to accomplish the spectacular purpose which the verse in Matthew seems to imply. Nowhere outside of this verse (xii. 40) is this unique experience of the prophet regarded as his sign. The *recital* of his experience, as Broadus suggests, would not be a *sign*, in the Synoptic sense, to his hearers. The preceding facts show us that Matt. xii. 40 is not in harmony with the teaching of the Book of Jonah.

2. The teaching of this verse seems to be in conflict with the statements of the Gospel of Matthew, touching the time which Jesus remained in the tomb. This verse seems to teach that He arose on the fourth day after His burial; while the other statements of the Gospel teach that He arose on the third day (Matt. xvi. 21, xvii. 23, xx. 19, xxvii. 63, 64, cf. xxvi. 61, xxvii. 40). It seems almost impossible to make this expression ('three days and three nights') equal thirty-six hours. This number of hours cannot by any shortening process be made into less than *one full day*, and *two partial days* and nights. 1 Sam. xxx. 12, 13 are used to show that 'three days and three nights' were equivalent to three days, or to parts of three days. But these verses do not seem to teach this; for ver. 13 says that 'the Egyptian fell sick on the third day.' This does not necessarily support the teaching based upon it. Shorten the time apparently implied in the expression—'three days,' etc.—so as to make it equal thirty-six hours, and the process seems both irrational and incredible. Dr. Broadus thinks that the critics find fault with Matt. xii. 40 'because the miracle of the great fish does not please the critics.' This may apply to others, but not to the present writer; for I believe in the miraculous. The real ground for questioning this verse is partially

¹ I use the term 'sign' of a 'visible portent or token' (Matt. xxiv. 3, 24, 30, xxvi. 48, etc.); for this is its only signification in the Synoptics.

taught by Professor Broadus when he says, 'There is then apparent conflict between these seven statements (see above) and Matt. xii. 40.'

It should be observed that the word 'was' (ἦν, xii. 40) is not *conclusive* evidence that Jesus regarded the miraculous deliverance of Jonah as an historical fact (cf. Luke xvi. 1, 19-31 with Matt. xii. 40); although I believe that He and His disciples accepted its historicity.

Another source of difficulty is the fact that the *burial* of Jesus (or His resurrection, or both) is here regarded as 'the sign of Jesus to His generation.' Neither of these is so considered in any other part of Matthew's Gospel. The resurrection could not be a 'sign' in the Synoptic sense of the term; for none of these (enemies) hearers witnessed either the burial or the resurrection (Acts x. 40, 41). Furthermore, the sign of Jesus must denote, in view of the request in the context (Matt. xii. 38, 39), the sign which Jesus would give.

3. We pass now to consider the relations of the verse under consideration to the passage in Luke's Gospel.

There are no grounds for doubting that Luke xi. 30 is a record of the same discourse which is reported in Matthew. When these two reports are compared, we see that Luke makes no reference to the great sea-monster or to the burial of Jesus. Jonah himself 'became,' or 'was a sign,' to the Ninevites. Jesus Himself was to be a sign to His generation. These differences between the two reports, even if we accept the traditional explanation of the three days and three nights, cannot be easily, if at all, harmonised. We have already observed that the narrative of Matthew (xii. 40) does not agree with the Book of Jonah. Does Luke's report accord with the narrative of the Book of Jonah? Yes, in every detail. We read in the latter that God sent Jonah to preach to the Ninevites. No sign was given to him for the purpose of showing it to them. He was not instructed to give them any sign whatever. No record is given that they demanded a sign from the prophet, or received from him any visible token. His presence, a Jewish prophet, among the Gentiles and the proclamation of his message were the only evidences given to the Ninevites. Jesus, likewise, was sent to preach repentance to His hearers. We ought to remember that there is in Luke's Gospel no evidence

that Jesus gave, after this time, any sign to these hearers. This fact agrees with the statement of Luke xi. 29: 'And no sign shall be given to it, except the sign of Jonah,' etc. (cf. Mark viii. 12; Matt. xvi. 4). It is true that after this He healed the infirm woman (Luke xiii. 10-17), and gave sight to Bartimæus (Luke xviii. 35-43). But neither of these was performed *for the purpose* of granting a sign to his hearers. The former was wrought as a work of necessity ('ought not'). The latter was the answer of Jesus to the earnest entreaty of the blind man. In harmony with the conception of Jonah and Jesus as 'signs,' to their respective listeners we find the narrative respecting Gabriel, who regarded his presence and

message as a sufficient sign to Zacharias (Luke i. 8-20.)

We have now seen that the record of Luke is in harmony with itself and the Book of Jonah, while it differs from Matt. xii. 40; consequently, we are led to question this verse.

4. When we consider the relations of Matt. xii. 40 to the other New Testament books, we find that none of them refer to either the preservation of Jonah or the burial of Jesus as the 'signs' respectively of these persons. They agree with Luke respecting the time spent by Jesus in the tomb much better than with Matt. xii. 40. Since these things are so, I must confess that this verse seems to me as an interpolation.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

II.

THE SONGS OF THE HOLY NATIVITY.

By T. D. BERNARD, M.A. (*Macmillan*. Crown 8vo, pp. x, 164. 5s.) Canon Bernard of Wells recently published an expository study of the Great Conversation in St. John. We may hope that he means to continue the excellent practice of thus selecting a central portion for separate treatment. For here are the Songs of the Nativity chosen and handled in the same way. It is not exposition alone. There is no criticism, certainly, in the present sense of that term; but there is searching and sifting of words and phrases that the meaning may be securely ascertained. And then there is that inner application, which we call devotional, to distinguish it from the plain exposition of the Word. Perhaps this title would describe the volume best: A Scholar's Devotional Guide to the understanding of the Songs of the Nativity.

SIX LECTURES ON THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS. By F. J. A. HORT, D.D. (*Macmillan*. Crown 8vo, pp. viii, 138. 3s. 6d.) These are 'short studies on great subjects.' But the study that was given to the subjects was not short. Though popular in form, and extremely pleasant to follow,

they rest upon independent research, painstaking and conscientious. Dr. Hort's work, so far as it has been published, strains our attention to the utmost; this is a pleasant variety, and no doubt it will have a much larger circulation.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL EXPANSION OF ENGLAND. By ALFRED BARRY, D.D., D.C.L. (*Macmillan*. Crown 8vo, pp. xi, 387. 6s.) Under this title Bishop Barry has published the Hulsean Lectures for 1894-95. Rather under the full title of: 'The Ecclesiastical Expansion of England in the Growth of the Anglican Communion.' And that is more informing. Thus the field is narrower and more manageable. And Dr. Barry manages it well. He has not only heard with his ears, he has seen with his eyes the ecclesiastical expansion of the Anglican communion. And with leisure to study, he brings a unique personality to this great subject. The book is written in a calm, dignified style, for Dr. Barry is singularly free from puerile ambitions and from sectarian jealousies. Perhaps the most valuable contribution to the subject is the chapter entitled 'The Growth of the Colonial Churches'; and that is as we should have expected it to be.