

## Him Dead and Buried We Confess

*Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Him dead and buried we confess,  
The storm our sins had raised t'appease,  
Three days and nights for us confined;  
But lo, emerging from the grave,  
He comes, a ransomed world to save,  
He preaches life to all mankind!

O that we all His words might hear,  
A greater far than Jonah fear,  
And live and die, at His command!  
Then shall the grave its prey restore,  
Raised by His resurrection's power,  
And cast us on the heavenly land.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Jesus and the Bible: Old Testament Miracles

*Kevin T. Bauder*

Some people talk as if they wish to believe in the inspiration of the Bible, but they stumble over its miraculous stories. To them, accounts like Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt or Jonah being swallowed by a whale or great fish seem mythological, not historical. Such people either reject inspiration outright, or else they redefine it so that these stories do not have to be taken as true.

This unwillingness to trust the plain text of Scripture was not shared by Jesus. He regularly drew upon the Old Testament as a source of authority, and He did not shy away from the miraculous accounts. Indeed, Jesus references these miracles so often that it almost seems as if He went looking for them.

For example, when Jesus was quizzed about marriage and divorce, He appealed directly to the original creation account in Genesis 1–2. He flatly stated that the creator made humans as male and female, implying belief in the historical Adam and Eve. He further taught that God Himself instituted marriage (Matt 19:4–5). In the process of this discussion, Jesus quoted directly from Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24.

Jesus also spoke of Noah's flood as if it were an actual event in the past (Luke 17:26–27). He stated that people were living normal lives (eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage) right up to the moment that the flood came. In other words, Jesus believed that the flood was not anticipated by its victims. He also emphasized the worldwide scope of the flood in decimating humanity: the flood destroyed them all.

In a parallel example Jesus referenced the miraculous destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an event where fire and brimstone rained from heaven (Luke 17:28–33). He stated that a comparable judgment would occur before His return, and He warned people against failing to take that judgment seriously. To emphasize His warning, He told his listeners to "remember Lot's wife." Evidently Jesus had no difficulty accepting this account as true.

The same can be said of Moses at the burning bush. In Luke 20:37, Jesus corrected the Sadducees' mistaken denial of a future resurrection by appealing to Exodus 3:7, where God identifies Himself as "the God of Abraham, and



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the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus’ punch line was that God is not the God of the dead (the patriarchs had died centuries earlier) but the God of the living. Along the way, however, Jesus makes it clear that He is referencing the episode of Moses at the burning bush. Jesus not only makes His theological point but incidentally endorses belief in the miracle.

Another episode occurs near the end of Matthew 12, which is a turning point in Matthew’s narrative. In this chapter the Jewish leadership clearly rejects Jesus as the Messiah, with the result that the nation forfeits the opportunity to receive an imminent kingdom. In the wake of this rejection the crowd cynically demands a sign. In fact, they have already had more signs than they need, and their demand for another is equivalent to a further rejection. Speaking a word of judgment against Israel, Jesus calls the nation “evil and adulterous,” and says that the only remaining sign they will receive is the sign of Jonah the prophet: “For as Jonas 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” (Matt 12:40). Jesus even adds that the men of Nineveh will rise in judgment against Israel, because the Ninevites repented at Jonah’s preaching.

These examples are only illustrative. For example, Jesus referenced miracles by Elijah and Elisha. He also discussed the manna in the wilderness. The present listing is not meant to be exhaustive, but it clearly shows how Jesus endorsed even those parts of the Old Testament that seem hardest for modern people to believe.

Some suggest that Jesus did not really believe in these miracles, but that He was merely accommodating His teachings to the sensibilities and understanding of His crowd. That suggestion flies in the face of everything we know about Jesus’ method of teaching. While He was compassionate and while He readily forgave sins, He simply never countenanced error. Whoever was wrong—scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, even ordinary people—could expect correction from Jesus.

Other have suggested that Jesus so emptied Himself of His omniscience in the incarnation that He could and did believe errors. The kernel of truth in this argument is that the person of Jesus is limited in knowledge according to His human nature. While He remains omniscient according to His divine nature, during His humiliation He did not have conscious and unmediated access to all of His divine knowledge. For instance, He had to ask who touched Him. He acknowledged before His crucifixion that He did not know the day or hour of His return.

Not knowing something, however, is not the same as believing an error. A working definition of knowledge is that it is justified, true belief. Not all beliefs are true; not all beliefs are justified. Therefore, not all beliefs constitute knowledge. During His humiliation, Jesus lacked information about

some things according to His human nature. Concerning those things He expressed no beliefs. When He did express beliefs, however, they were both true and justified. To put it in other words, Jesus knew what He knew, and He also knew what He did not know, but He never thought He knew something that turned out to be mistaken.

Suppose the opposite were true. Suppose that Jesus actually were mistaken about, say, the burning bush or Lot’s wife. We could no longer trust His use of the miracle story, which means that we could no longer accept the argument that He based upon the story. Those arguments, however, touch upon the core of who Jesus is, what He came to do, and what His rule will be like. If we cannot take Jesus’ word for the burning bush, for example, then we cannot take His word for the resurrection from the dead. By the time we dismiss everything that Jesus inferred from those miracle stories, our Christianity will be gone.

There is no escaping Jesus’ perception of the Old Testament. During His ministry He singled out several of the most controversial accounts of miracles to be found in the text. In every case, He spoke of those accounts as if they were completely true. Clearly Jesus believed them to be true, and He was willing to base His teachings upon them.

We should be able to accept Jesus’ evaluation of the text. If we do, we shall experience no difficulty placing our full confidence both in what it says and in what Jesus infers from what it says. The fact is that Jesus never used the Old Testament text as if it were anything but infallible and inerrant. Neither should we.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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