

The Missionary and the Magician

by Edward N Brown

EXCERPT

After a long silence, Peter is motioned to speak up first:

“Citizens of Rome,” he begins, “you are here to judge between the two of us – who speaks the truth of God and who speaks the lies of the devil? So, I tell you here and now, that I have believed, and still do believe, in the living and true God – and I promise to give you proofs of His glory, which are known to me, and also to many among you.

“For you see that this man standing here has been rebuked more than once. He knows that I drove him out of Judaea because of the deceits and transgressions that he inflicted upon an honorable and simple woman named Eubula – offences using artful tricks and sorcery. Being driven out from Judaea, he has now come here – thinking that since you know nothing about his sordid past, he can be free of preconceived notions among you. And now, he stands face-to-face with me here.

“So, tell us now, Simon, did you not fall at my feet in Samaria, when you witnessed the healings that were done by our hands? Did you not say, ‘Please accept some money from me – as much as I have – just teach me how to do such mighty works by simply laying hands on men.’?”

“And when we heard you say this, did we not rebuke you, saying, ‘Do you think that you can bribe us into teaching you the mysteries of God? Do you think that we desire to possess money? Do you think that faith in God can be bought with money? Have you no fear of God?’

“So, I tell you now that my name is Peter, because the Lord Christ wished to call me ‘prepared for all things’.¹ And I trust in the living God with all of my heart – by whom I shall expose you as a fraud and put down your sorceries.²

“People of Rome, ask him now to do in front of all of you, what he previously has done in front of just a few people in private rooms. Therefore, in light of what I have said about him, do you still believe in him?”

But Simon speaks up proudly, “The Lord Christ you speak of – I presume you mean Jesus of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, and a carpenter himself – whose birth is recorded in Judaea. Now hear this, Peter: The Romans have understanding – they are not fools.”

And then he turns to the crowd and says, “Honorable men and women of Rome: can a god be born of a mortal woman? Can he be crucified on a cross? Jesus was seen to pray, and call to his master. But he who has a master cannot be a god.”

And when he had said this, many in the crowd shout, “You have said well, Simon.”

With that, Peter becomes irritated, and snaps back, “Cursed are your words against my Lord Jesus Christ! Do you presume to know more than the Hebrew prophets of old? For it was an ancient prophet who once said, ‘He had no beauty or comeliness – he was alone and rejected by his own kind.’³ And it was another prophet who said, ‘In the last days, a child shall be born of the Holy Ghost – his mother never knew a man, and no one claims that he is his father.’⁴ And another has said, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb. Neither did we hear her voice, and neither did a midwife come in.’⁵ And another prophet has said, ‘Born not from the womb of a woman, but he came down from a heavenly place. Behold, I saw one like the Son of man coming upon a cloud.’⁶

“What more can I say? Everything in the sacred Scriptures points to the coming of the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth! O, men of Rome, if you knew the Scriptures of the prophets, I could teach you more about the sacred mysteries – about how the kingdom of God is made manifest to those on earth – and how eternal life in heaven can be obtained. All these things will become known to you in the near future.

But now I turn to you Simon – do one of those tricks that you have done before, and by which you have deceived many people. Do it again, and by calling on the name of Jesus Christ, I will show it to be nothing but deception.”

NOTES

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1. Peter had not yet realized the full meaning of being called 'Rock', and all the implications of the future role of the church. Reference: Matthew 16:18 and John 1:42.
 2. Peter's recounting of events in Samaria differs slightly from the account recorded in Acts 8:9-24.
 3. Isaiah 53:2-3; Mark 6:1-4; John 1:11
 4. Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:30-35
 5. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23
 6. Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27