

The Signs of the Times in Jesus' Own Words: "The Sign of Jonah"

"Signs of the Times" in the Words of Jesus (P1) The Sign of
Jonah

Throughout the Old Testament, the Jews sought, even demanded, signs from God or anyone who claimed to be sent from Him. As we move to the NT, the Jewish leaders continued to do so. That may be directly related to the way God performed so many signs and wonders beginning with Moses and the Exodus deliverance. But throughout their history, God became fed up with them as a sinful, rebellious people. He finally delivered them over to pagan kingdoms (Assyria and Babylon). The nation of Israel, God's chosen people, no longer existed.

At the time of Jesus in history, the Israelites had been dispersed to other countries though some remained or returned to Jerusalem and what had been the land of Israel. They were coming out of what is referred to in Biblical history as the "silent four hundred years" or Apocryphal period (from Malachi 4:6 to Matthew 1:1).

During those years, **God did not speak to them** directly or thru prophets whom they had killed or rejected. Now the first prophet in over four hundred years came on the scene—John the Baptist. He was the forerunner who announced the coming of the Messiah. John pointed everyone to Jesus. This fulfilled many OT prophecies, yet the religious leaders not only resisted Jesus as Messiah but rejected Him outright and later had Him crucified as a criminal.

Jesus had been living and ministering among them openly for some time now, performing all kinds of miraculous signs including raising the dead. Yet the Jewish religious leaders

still asked for signs. How crazy was that? Now we come to the two passages in which they asked again for signs, and Jesus gave them an answer they probably did not understand and for which they hated Him even more.

In the verses leading to this exchange, Jesus had been challenged about the Sabbath. He told them He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Later He healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. The Pharisees accused Jesus of healing by the power of satan which is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Jesus then talked about the unpardonable sin of which they were guilty.

Finally, He spoke about good trees bearing good fruit and the converse – bad ones that produce evil deeds and words for which they would have to give an account. The fact that they kept pursuing and challenging Jesus showed they were relentless and intent on proving Him a liar from satan. Finally we come to our passage for today.

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves a sign; and so no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah WAS IN THE STOMACH OF THE SEA MONSTER FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” Matthew 12: 38-41

Throughout the next few chapters, Jesus continued to teach truth to those who would listen, perform miracles, and confound and anger the Jewish religious leaders. As we read in the previous passage, so we read again as Chapter Sixteen opens.

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and putting Jesus to the test, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but are you unable to discern the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation wants a sign; and so a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away.” Matthew 16: 1-4

What did Jesus mean when He told them (twice) the only sign they would get would be the “sign of Jonah”? The answer is found in the first passage. (Re-read Matthew 12: 39-40) He reminded them of the (true) story of Jonah. Jonah spent three days and nights in the great fish and was spit out on shore by the working of God so that Jonah would do what God sent him to do—go preach repentance to Nineveh.

In like manner after His crucifixion, Jesus would be dead in the grave for three days and nights before being resurrected. Thus He would conquer death and accomplish all the Father sent Him to. But these Jews would not believe in Jesus, despite seeing His many miracles. It is implied that they will not believe when He rose from the grave on the third day. Jesus went on to condemn their unbelief and failure to repent in His statement about Nineveh. Many Ninevites repented at the teaching of Jonah. They would be among the accusers who stood to testify against these unbelieving Jews at the judgement because Jesus Messiah was greater than Jonah the evangelist.

In the second account (different location), Jesus was again challenged to give the Jewish religious leaders signs. Keep in mind all the miraculous signs He did throughout His ministry. On this occasion, Jesus reminded them of signs they see and read all the time in nature. Yet there were not wise enough to know that His coming and miracles confirmed all the prophecies

in the Old Testament. They should have known because they were the “experts” in the law and the prophetic teachings. Still they asked for more signs.

This time Jesus gave them more of a rebuke, referring to them as “evil and adulterous”. He referred again to the “sign of Jonah” and left them in their sin.

The Message to Christians: Be on the alert. Unbelievers of all kinds are watching and listening for you to trip up, fall back into sin, or simply be weak in your testimony. Are you able to defend your faith to skeptics and point them to the Truth of the Gospel?

The Message to Unbelievers: Be like the Ninevites who repented from their sins when the truth of God’s love and plan of redemption were shared with them. **Repent**. Do not be like the skeptics who witnessed many of Jesus’ miracles, including raising the dead, yet denied their reality or accused Him of being demonic. To do so is certain condemnation to eternity in Hell. That may sound harsh, but it is harsh reality for those who, like the Jewish religious leaders, did so despite God sending Jesus directly to them. **Repent. Believe. Receive.**

For Christ’s sake,

Walter