

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32

DIG: Why do you think the Pharisees wanted to see a miracle? How does Jesus feel about **this generation**? Why? What is **the sign of Jonah**? How is Yeshua greater than Yonah? How is Jonah a type of Christ? How might the Pharisees have interpreted this?

REFLECT: Have you ever asked God for **a sign**? Is it biblical? Is there a difference between confirmation from ADONAI and **a sign**? Where do we get confirmation?

The Sign to the Nation: As the crowds increased, Jesus said to them: **This is a wicked generation.** The emphasis was on that particular **generation**. The common people are beginning to accept the pharisaic interpretation. **It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation** (Luke 11:29-30). The Messiah - the Creator, Savior, and Judge of the entire world - accepted the entire record of Yonah as absolutely real and profoundly important. **Isra'el was to receive no more signs but the sign of Jonah, which was the sign of resurrection.** This **sign** was to come to Isra'el three different times.

The first sign of Jonah was the resurrection of Lazarus (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ia - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah**), which was rejected when the Sanhedrin plotted to kill Jesus (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ib - The Plot to Kill Jesus**).

The second sign of Jonah was the resurrection of Christ (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Mc - The Resurrection of Jesus: The Second Sign of Jonah**), which was rejected when the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen in Acts 7:1-60.

The third sign of Jonah will be the resurrection of the Two Witnesses (see my commentary on **Revelation Dm - The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses**), which will be accepted and **all Isra'el will be saved** (see my commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**).

The Queen of the South, (First Kings 10:1-13) will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ep - The Queen of the South Will Rise at the Judgment with This Generation and**

Condemn It), for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom and profited by it. Now **this generation** had heard the wisdom of **One greater than Solomon** but turned from **His** word. Therefore, **the men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here (Luke 11:31-32)**. A greater preacher than **Yonah** and a wiser sage than **Solomon** was here, making **their** condemnation even greater for rejecting **Him**.

After hearing **Christ's** words of rebuke and judgment for blaspheming the **Holy Spirit**, some of the **Pharisees and Torah-teachers** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Co - Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man**) tried to retake the offensive by saying to **Him**, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You" (**Matthew 12:38**). That **they** answered the **Lord's** biting denunciation by asking **Him** a superficially respectful question indicated that **they** were biting **their** tongues, as it were, determined to give the impression of civility until the best time to attack **Him**.

The **Rabbi from Galilee** categorically refused to grant **them a sign**, but directed **them** back to **two incidents** in the TaNaKh. **The first incident is the account of the prophet Jonah** who was raised from the dead after being swallowed by a whale (see my commentary on **Jonah Ar - The LORD Prepared a Great Whale to Swallow Jonah**). **The second incident that Jesus referred to is the concerns of Solomon** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ep - The Queen of the South will Rise with This Generation and Condemn It**). **Jesus** was greater than **Jonah** and greater than **Solomon**. **The queen of Sheba** heard of **Solomon** and traveled from the ends of the earth to hear **his** wisdom. And yet **Messiah** had come from heaven, but **the Pharisees and Torah-teachers** would not listen to **Him**.⁶²

The Pharisees and Torah-teachers did not consider anyone outside of **their** own party to be qualified to teach **them** anything. So when **they** addressed **Yeshua** as **teacher**, **their** response was both sarcastic and hypocritical. It was sarcastic because **they** considered the **Nazarene** to be a heretic and blasphemer, and merely looked for a way to expose **Him** as a false **teacher**. It was hypocritical because **they** mocked **Him** in front of the crowd.

The kind of **sign they** wanted was not specified, but it must have been a whopper, probably something on a worldwide magnitude. **The miracle-working Rabbi** had already performed three messianic miracles (see my commentary on **Isaiah 61 - The Three Messianic Miracles**). But **they** wanted more on an even greater scale.

It was not that the **Pharisees and Torah-teachers** really expected **Yeshua** to perform any such sign because their very purpose was to prove **He** could not do such a thing and thereby to discredit **Him** in the eyes of the people. Even though no prophecy in the TaNaKh ever foresaw that the **Meshiach** would perform a **sign** on the magnitude **they** demanded, the **Jewish leaders** gave the impression to the people that it did.⁶³

The **maverick Rabbi** responded to **their** sarcastic challenge by first declaring that the very fact that **they** were **asking for a sign** reflected the **evil** expectations of **their wicked and adulterous generation** (**Mattityahu 12:39a**). **Their** flawed acceptance of the Oral Law (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**), led **them** into a superficial, self-righteous, and legalistic belief system. The Great Sanhedrin (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**) had led the nation astray.

Consequently, **Jesus** said that **no** such **sign would be given** (**Matthew 19:39b**). It wasn't possible for **Christ** to perform the kind of miracle that the **Pharisees and Torah-teachers** wanted - not because **He** didn't have the power to do so, but because it was totally contrary to **ADONAI'S** nature and plan. **God** was not, and is not, in the business of satisfying the whims of wicked people who have no relationship with **Him**.

Nevertheless, the **Lord** declared that another kind of **sign** would be given: **the sign of the prophet Jonah**. **Yeshua** had already changed **His** policy regarding signs (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry**). So as a result of this new policy, **He** now said: **For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth** (**Matthew 12:39c-40**). Type 3. **Yonah** is a type of **Christ** because both **Jesus** and the wayward prophet spent three days and three nights in the grave. **God** brought **Jonah** out of darkness and death into the light and life. **Jonah's** experience was a snapshot of the coming burial and resurrection of the **Meshiach**. The **religious leaders** from **Yerushalayim** would not understand the illustration, but those of faith would.

Continuing with **His** illustration from the life of **Jonah**, **Christ** contrasted the response of the pagan **Ninevites** to **Jonah's** message with the response of the **Pharisees and Torah-teachers** to **His**. In one of **His** most biting rebukes, the **Nazarene** told the self-righteous **Jewish leaders**, who thought **they** were the cream of the crop of **God's** people, that **the men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here** (**Mattityahu 12:41**).

Despite **Jonah's** reluctance to preach **God's** message to the evil and idolatrous **Assyrians of Nineveh**, when the prophet finally began to preach, **Ha'Shem** produced an unparalleled response: **The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust (Jonah 3:5-6). Covering oneself with sackcloth and sitting in the dust was their way of showing genuine sorrow and repentance for sin. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened (Jonah 3:10).**

The men of Nineveh were not only Gentiles and had no part of **YHVH's** covenant or Torah, but were especially evil and cruel - even by pagan standards. **They** did not know **ADONAI** or His will, however, **they** were redeemed by **their** sincere repentance, and spared destruction as proclaimed by the disgruntled prophet's harsh message: **Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown (Jonah 3:4). Jonah** performed no miracles and gave no promise of deliverance; however, on the basis of his brief message of destruction the people of **Nineveh** threw themselves on the mercy of the **LORD** and were saved.

Isra'el, on the other hand, was the chosen covenant people of **God**, privileged to have been given His Torah, His promises, His protection, and His special blessings in ways too numerous to list. Yet her people would not repent and turn from their sin even when **ADONAI's** own **Son, something greater than Jonah**, preached to them in gentle humility and gracious love, performed three messianic miracles, and offered **God's** gracious forgiveness and eternal life with **Him** in heaven. Nevertheless, **His** chosen people chose to turn **their** backs on **Him**. And for that **they** would stand under the condemnation of former pagans at **the judgment** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**).

It is significant to point out that for traditional Jews, **the sign of Jonah** is unwittingly contemplated once a year on the most high holy day of Yom Kippur (see my commentary on **Exodus Go - The Day of Atonement**). It is on this most significant day that the designated reading from the Prophets is none other than the entire scroll of **Jonah**. Therefore, **Jesus** continues to be for us a major sign of the true **Meshiach** every year as we attend high holy day services in the fall.⁶⁴