

# The Pharisees and Sadducees Ask for a Sign

## Matthew 15:39 to 16:4 and Mark 8:9b-12

**DIG:** What do you think the Pharisees and Sadducees actually were hoping to see in the sky? How convincing would a sign have been for these religious leaders? Would they have believed? Why or why not? What were they trying to accomplish?

**REFLECT:** Can you see anything of yourself in the attitude of those who asked for a sign? Do you sometimes doubt Jesus' ability to meet your needs? How so? Do you seek to put Him to the test by demanding signs that suit you, rather than trusting Him and acknowledging your total dependence on Him? Do you truly believe the words of Christ that the Father knows what you need before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8)? Does your life exhibit that kind of faith?

After Yeshua had fed the multitude (see Fu - Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Feeds the 4,000) He sent the crowd away (Mark 8:9b). Then He got into the boat and returned to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee with His talmidim that Matthew refers to as Magadan (15:39) and Mark refers to as Dalmanutha (8:10). Magadan was the name of a town, while Dalmanutha in Aramaic meant the harbor. Consequently, Dalmanutha was the harbor of Magadan that was located near Capernaum.

Even after the Sanhedrin rejected the Nazarene's messianic claims, sometimes the Pharisees and Sadducees would still come to the Lord and test Him. This time they came and asked Him to show them a sign from heaven (Matthew 16:1; Mark 8:11). It was as if they were saying, "Your miracles are merely deception and a fraud. Show us a sign from heaven, like causing the sun to stand still (Joshua 10:12-14) or calling down fire (First Kings 18:30-40)."<sup>847</sup> Every section of the ruling classes - the Pharisees, formidable from their religious weight among the people; the Sadducees, few in number, but powerful from wealth and position; the Herodians, representing all the power of Rome, and their nominees the tetrarchs; the Torah-teachers, bring to bear the authority of their orthodoxy and learning - were all united against Him in one firm phalanx of conspiracy and opposition.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were so intent on discrediting Jesus that they went out from their seat in the Holy City and ventured deep into the heathen region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31). Otherwise carefully shunned, they would normally never think of going into Gentile territory. But their determination to get rid of Christ knew no limits. They were determined, above all things, to hinder His preaching and to alienate Him, as far as possible, from the affections of the people.<sup>848</sup> They hated Him.

**Twice before, they had come to Him asking for a sign.** The first was at the Passover at the beginning of **Messiah's** ministry (**John 2:18**). There **He** gave **them** the **sign** of His resurrection in figurative language that **they** used against **Him** at His last trial. **Their** second demand (**Mattityahu 12:38**) was clothed in contempt, consequently **Yeshua** gave **them** more figurative language about **Jonah's** message to **Nineveh** from **the belly of a whale for three days and three nights**, and of His own death and resurrection. **He** said **their** condemnation would be greater than that of **the Ninevites** because of **their** attitude toward **Him**, who was greater than **Jonah**.

**The Lord** had warned **them**, along with **the multitude**, not to be seeking bread-from-heaven signs. **The people** had turned away from **Him** at that time because **He** would not repeat the sign of the miraculous feeding and kept it up, like Moshe had done, for years. Therefore, **His** enemies came to **the Savior** asking for a **sign** that **they** *knew* **He** wouldn't give, in the hopes that **the people** would be alienated from **Him** all the more.<sup>849</sup>

The problem, of course, was not with the miracles **Yeshua** had performed but with **the Pharisees'** interpretation of them. **Jesus** could tell **they** were hypocrites because **they** had already made a decision that **His** signs were from the Adversary (see **Ek - It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives out Demons**). **The Jewish religious leaders** began to question **Him**. The fact that **they** asked for a **sign** from heaven revealed that **they** were really not looking for the **sign**, but evidence to convict **the Lord** of blasphemy. The verbal form **to question** is a present infinitive, showing continuous action. In reality, **they** were cross-examining **Him**.<sup>850</sup>

**The Pharisees and Sadducees** pretended that they wanted a **sign** showing that **Jesus** was, indeed, a spokesman for **ADONAI**. This **sign** was not just from "heaven" in the generic sense, but the conversation reflects the traditional way of substituting a word for the name of **God, the One** who dwells "in the heavens." **They** were in fact asking **the Lord** to confirm that **He** was doing **His** miracles in the name of **God** and was, in fact, **the Messiah** of Isra'el. But already being rejected, **He** saw right through **their** thinly veiled request.

**But Jesus absolutely refused to meet their third demand for a sign.** His response consisted of a simple yet profound parable (see **Er - That Same Day He Spoke To Them In Parables**). By doing so, those who heard through the ears of faith would glean the truth, but the skeptics would be judged with more confusion. **He** started with a common observation about weather patterns. Even the most simple observer could conclude that **when evening comes, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red"** (**Matthew 16:2**). **And** by contrast, **in the morning, you say, "Today it will be stormy, for the sky is**

red and overcast.” Those Pharisees and Sadducees could interpret the appearance of the sky, but [they could] not interpret the signs of the times right in front of them (Matthew 16:3). It was way past the time for another request for a sign from God. There had been several messianic miracles, healings and feedings that testified that Jesus was the promised Son of God.

It had reached the point where only a wicked and adulterous generation could ask for another sign. Jesus sighed deeply from the bottom of His heart and said: Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. However, Yeshua did not give an answer, which was in fact the same response He gave to other skeptics. No sign would be given except the sign of Jonah. By this, He was referring to His own resurrection. The sigh was physical, but its source was spiritual - a sense of irreconcilable hostility, unshakable unbelief, and coming doom. There would be no more public miracles to try and convince the nation that He was the Messiah. The opportunity had already been missed (see En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry). There was no need for Him to speak to those rabbis any more about His identity, their minds were made up, their hearts were cold as stone; therefore, He then left them and went away (Matthew 16:4; Mark 8:12). There is never enough proof for unbelief.

The sign of Jonah is associated with the three days and three nights the prophet Jonah spent in the belly of a great sperm whale, which is the sign of the resurrection (see my commentary on Jonah Au - From the Belly of the Whale Jonah Prayed to the LORD). As such, the ancient prophet of Isra'el is a perfect type of death and resurrection of Yeshua ha-Mashiach. The sign of Jonah will come to Isra'el on three occasions:

First, the sign will be seen in the death and resurrection of Lazarus (see Ia - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah).

Secondly, it will be seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Mc - The Resurrection of Jesus: The Second Sign of Jonah).

And thirdly, it will be seen in the death and resurrection of the two witnesses during the Great Tribulation in the last days (see my commentary on the book of Revelation Dm - The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses: The Third Sign of Jonah).

It is significant to point out that for traditional Jews, the sign of Jonah is 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. Thus, ADONAI continues to give

those who love the **God** of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a major **sign** of the true **Meshiach** every year as we attend High Holy Day services in the fall.<sup>851</sup>