

May 3, 2009

**THE SIGN OF JONAH
MATTHEW 12.38-40**

The sign of Jonah involves impending, imminent judgment upon Israel, the prophet as Israel's representative, and God's mercy upon the Gentiles.

Time reference for this sign: "This generation," referring to the time of Jesus, specifically from AD 30 - 70.

The biblical nature of a "sign." "Signs" in Scripture are not simply inert "pointers to something else" (e.g. like a road sign). That function is involved in them, but biblical signs are much more than that.

Biblical signs are effective, powerful works of some sort. Signs are, generally speaking, *extraordinary works that proclaim or announce the deliverance of God's people.*

Gospel of John structured around 7 *signs*. These indicate that Jesus is truly the Son of God and that through faith in him we have eternal life; the ultimate deliverance (cf. John 20.31).

God-given signs are condensed or concentrated activity that indicates what will be true of his people from that point forward. God does in a short amount of time what will occur over a long period of time in the history of his people from that point forward.

Signs tell God's people (1) what God will do for them and (2) what their calling is as his people. E.g. healings of Jesus.

God grants signs. Sometimes it is all right to ask for signs. We see this in the case of king Ahaz in Isa 7. God commanded him to ask for a sign.

Sometimes it is sinful to ask for signs. When God has provided adequate signs for us, to continue to ask for more and more is a sign of rebellious unbelief. It is testing God; like the wilderness generation.

The sign of the prophet Jonah deals with some extraordinary, powerful act of God whereby he delivers his people. But the deliverance of God's people always means that they are delivered *from something or someone*. This means that deliverance of God's people necessarily means the destruction of God's enemies.

Jonah was a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam I (son of Nebat) was a wicked king who sought to consolidate power by setting up false worship in the Northern Kingdom.

Jeroboam II, the king during the prophecy of Jonah (2Kg 14.25), Hosea (1.1), and Amos (1.1) did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (2Kg 14.24). So, idolatry—spiritual adultery—was prevalent during the life of Jonah.

Cf. Jonah 1.2; 3.4 - Jonah commanded to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, to preach that they would be destroyed in 40 days.

Jonah knows that if God is sending his prophet to preach that he plans on having mercy (cf. Jonah 4.2)

Jonah had a "death wish." He wanted to die (Jonah 4.2ff.). Seems that he wants to die when thrown into the sea (Jonah 1).

Even while being rebellious Gentiles are being converted all around him; sailors, Ninevites.

Why is he so upset? Jonah loved Israel. Cf. Dt 32 (Song of Moses) - When Israel serves other gods, YHWH will turn his affection to other nations in order to make Israel jealous.

Jonah knows that when God shows favor to the Assyrians he is about to punish Israel and send them into captivity, allowing them to be devoured by the beasts. This happens in 722 when Assyria takes the Northern Kingdom into captivity.

Jonah becomes the embodiment of Israel itself. Israel was supposed to be a faithful nation and through her the nations would see the wisdom of their God and come to worship him. But Israel is rebellious and gives a false witness. Even through Israel's rebellion, though, God is accomplishing his plan and will convert the nations/Gentiles.

Jonah is cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish/sea monster (prepared for the occasion; 1.17). He was in the belly of the fish/Sheol for three days and nights.

Sea = nations/Gentiles (cf. Ps 65.7-8). Israel = land

Sea creatures/monsters = Gentile leaders (cf. Ps 74.12-17; Jer 51.34, 44).

Jonah is the embodiment of Israel as a prophet. He is rebellious. B/c of his rebellion he is cast into the sea of the Gentiles and swallowed up by the great fish, the rulers of the Gentiles. This is the fate for Israel.

Bad news Israel will be punished for her sins. Good news - Gentiles will actually provide a safe haven for Israel in their captivity and Israel will eventually be "vomited up" on dry land again; they will once again be a "land people."

Through all of this God will not only deliver Israel, he will be faithful to his promises that through Israel all the nations will be saved or blessed, as he said to Abraham. He will accomplish this even through Israel's rebellion and through a representative of Israel, a prophet.

1. *Israel has been a rebellious bride and is under the threat of imminent punishment from God; particularly being "swallowed up" by the Gentiles.*

Her ultimate rebellion is in the rejection of her incarnate husband: Jesus. Jesus has already referred to himself as the bridegroom back in ch. 9. Jesus has come to claim his bride, but his bride wants nothing to do with him. She has rejected and will continue to reject her husband.

The ultimate rejection will be demonstrated in the crucifixion. Israel will kill Jesus and put him in the grave in which he will stay for three days.

Ch. 24 - "sign of the Son of Man in heaven" that will be revealed when Israel is destroyed. The Romans will come and swallow up Jerusalem.

Because of her sins, rebellious Israel must go like rebellious Jonah down into the belly of Sheol. Israel must be destroyed. God is preparing the big fish of the Romans to do this very thing; to be his rod that will inflict the discipline upon her.

Israel will not survive this *as she presently exists*. As we will see, she has the promise of being vomited out, raised up, and becoming a true land people again, but it will be in a totally different situation.

2. *Israel is embodied in a representative prophet.*

Jonah as a prophet is a representative of Israel. As such Jonah goes through the waters and the belly of the fish—the belly of Sheol—as *Israel*. He goes *before* Israel into punishment/exile and he goes *as* Israel.

If Israel heeds the warning embodied in Jonah's prophetic life and repents, she might be spared like the Assyrians were spared when Jonah preached in Nineveh. But if she doesn't heed the "sign of Jonah," then she will surely go into punishment.

Jesus is the King of the Jews and the prophet who would arise like Moses and after Moses (Dt 18.18-19). He is Israel's representative. When Jesus goes to the grave he does so *before* Israel and *as* Israel. That is, he precedes Israel in judgment. And, if Israel understands the sign and repents, Israel may not have to go through being swallowed up.

3. *Israel's mission to the Gentiles being fulfilled.*

Israel existed so that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12.1-3). Through Israel—faithful or unfaithful—God will accomplish his plan.

a. *God is working out his plan faithfully despite the unfaithfulness of his people at times.*

b. *United to Christ in his going through the belly of Sheol and being raised again, we escape the wrath that rightfully belongs to us.*