

May 10, 2009

**PROPHETIC SIGNS, DEMONIC SWEEPS, AND TRUE SONS
MATTHEW 12.38-50**

Israel's privileged status will only be greater condemnation if they do not repent and follow Jesus and his kingdom mission. In fact, the Gentiles who heed Jesus' message will take Israel's privilege and judge Israel as God's true people because only those who obey the will of the Father as revealed in Jesus will be a part of his people.

1. A FISHY PROPHET, A WISE KING, AND OBEDIENT GENTILES (38-42)

The sign of Jonah (38-40): Note the correspondence between the scribes and Pharisees and Satan. Mt 4.1ff. "If you are the Son of God/David..." (cf. 2Sam 7.14). Cf. also 12.34: "children of vipers."

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign..." - Biblical resonances: the wilderness generation (Dt 1.35; 32.5, 20)

The children of Israel that were delivered from Egypt were delivered with great *signs* and wonders. Yet when they were in the wilderness they refused to believe God and grumbled and complained and tested him over and over again.

Cf. also Hosea 3.1: "wicked and adulterous" used to speak of Northern Kingdom. Hosea prophesying around the same situation as Jonah the prophet. Israel has been a harlot (like Hosea's wife, Gomer).

The scribes and Pharisees believed themselves to be scrupulous keepers of the Law. But they were Law-breakers because they replaced God's laws with their traditions (Mt 15).

What exactly are they seeking after when they seek after a sign? *An extraordinary work of God which announces that the deliverance of God's people has begun.* There is biblical precedent for this. They knew that when God was about to bring in a new epoch of history, that he did so in spectacular fashion.

Jesus has already given signs: cf. e.g. 12.28, if Jesus delivered demons by the Spirit, then the kingdom of God truly is breaking in upon the world. This was an effective sign that the kingdom was here.

This generation is "evil and adulterous" because they are not accepting the signs already given but demanding multiplication of signs. It doesn't matter how many signs they are given, their hearts are rebellious and they refuse to believe.

God will not give them a sign *except* the sign of Jonah. This will be the definitive sign that announces the deliverance of God's people: Jesus will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth as Jonah was in the belly of fish/sea monster.

Jonah: a prophet in Northern Kingdom who was called to go preach to the Ninevites (Assyrians). He knew God would be merciful to them (Jonah 4.1ff.). When God turns his affections to another people, Israel is in trouble. God would be fulfilling his promise to Abraham about blessing all the nations *and* make Israel jealous unto repentance.

Jonah embodied Israel's rebellion and was cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish/sea monster. This was symbolic of the fact that Israel would be cast into the nations (go into exile) and be ruled by Gentile rulers ("the great sea monster").

Jesus death and resurrection as "the sign of the prophet Jonah" = (in part) Israel lives under the threat of impending, imminent judgment. They are on the cusp of being swallowed up by the Gentiles, which in this case will be the Romans.

Parallel by contrast between Jonah and Jesus: Jonah is rebellious and embodies Israel's rebellion; Jesus is innocent & obedient but still embodies Israel's rebellion by suffering and dying at Israel's hands.

Israel needs to heed the sign and repent (something apostles call them to do in Acts).

Something greater than Jonah (41): another aspect of the sign: the Gentiles will be converted (fulfilling promise to Abraham).

Contrast between Ninevites and "this generation:" Ninevites repented *at the preaching* of Jonah; no spectacular signs.

2 important aspects: (1) that the Ninevites of that generation will participate in the resurrection of the dead and (2) that they will, as God's true sons, sit in judgment over the ungodly. The two go together; i.e. the purpose of the resurrection is to set up God's

Son/sons as judges. Cf. Dan 7; Mt 19.28. “Anomaly:” The Gentiles were the ones being resurrected!

“This generation” is not individuals as individuals; speaking of corporate Israel embodied in her leaders.

“Greater than Jonah” - (1) he is not a rebellious prophet but a faithful one who will embody Israel’s sins; (2) his mission does not look toward greater fulfillment.

Something greater than Solomon (42): The Queen of the South/Sheba (cf. 1Kg 10.1-13; 2Chr 9.1-12); falls in with the context of Jesus being acclaimed as “the Son of David.” She came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, the son of David.

She comes to “test” Solomon (like the Pharisees on one level) but responds positively when she *hears* the wisdom of Solomon. She will be *raised* and sit in judgment to condemn “this generation” (i.e. of Israel).

“Something greater than Solomon is here.” (1) He is the embodiment of the Wisdom of which Solomon wrote. (2) Solomon was the preliminary fulfillment of the son of God. But he turned out to be unfaithful in many ways. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Son of God and is faithful in every way.

The Queen responded positively to the lesser Solomon and this generation in Israel is rebelling against the greater Solomon.

In both cases—with the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba—Gentiles received the message, repented, and they are who were “not a people” have become “the people of God.” Again, this is actually part and parcel to the sign of Jonah the prophet.

2. HOMELESS DEMONS AND EMPTY HOUSES (43-45)

The swept house (43-44): Time reference: v. 45, “this wicked generation.”

Jesus is driving unclean spirits out by the Spirit of God (12.28). What happens when they are driven out? They go to the wilderness (“waterless places;” cf. also Mt 4.1-11).

Jesus is sweeping the house and putting it in order; something he will do in dramatic fashion in ch. 21 when he cleanses the Temple. He drives out the demons, cleaning house.

Demons coming home and bringing friends (45): But what happens when Jesus leaves? What happens if people don’t respond to Jesus message and don’t fill the house with good things? The demon that was cast out comes back with 7 of his friends. 7 = the perfection of wickedness.

Through his exorcisms Jesus is cleaning up the house. Now the people need to respond and be good house-keepers.

3. BROTHERS, SISTERS, AND MOTHERS OF JESUS (46-50)

The family is defined by obedience to the will of the Father, which is now understood to be loyalty to Jesus and his kingdom agenda.

This is a proper conclusion to what has gone before because God’s family will not ultimately be defined according to bloodlines. Even if that bloodline can be traced back to Abraham, it won’t be your ultimate claim to salvation. Only those defined by the faith of Abraham will be in God’s family. This is what was always the plan and purpose of God.

Jesus’ blood mother and some of his brother were believers (Ac 1.14; Gal 1.19). But their blood kinship gave them no priority in the kingdom. Jesus relativizes the blood family yet again.

1. *Don’t seek after signs except the ones granted to you.*

2. *Spiritual renovation is not simply about an initial cleaning but about up-keep and refurbishing.*

3. *Your blood family isn’t everything.*