

Lesson 249

Jesus and the Sign of Jonas

Story Elements



- **Text:** Matthew 12:38-45
- **Setting:** circa AD 28 in Galilee
- **Characters:** God, Jesus, and some Pharisees
- **Plot:** Jesus answers his enemies' demand for a miraculous sign.
- **Key word(s):** " _____ " (vv 39, 41, 42, 45) – Jesus condemns the generation of his day for their lack of faith and superficial spirituality.
- **Climax:** **Matthew 12:40** *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* This is the second time that Jesus announced his death, burial, and resurrection (the first is in John 2:19). With this statement, Jesus shows that the purpose of his ministry was not only teaching and doing miracles but dying and rising again.

Greater Evidence Rejected

1. (vv 38, 39) Some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a (miraculous) sign. Note:
 - (a) Jesus had already performed hundreds of miracles that were witnessed by multitudes of people (probably even the Pharisees here mentioned). It is not evidence they lack, it is _____. Spurgeon quips, "What further signs could they seek than those he had already given?"¹ Ryle adds, "There was evidence enough to convince them, but they had no wish to be convinced."²
 - (b) Jesus said, *an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.*
 - i. When Jesus condemns *this generation*, he is condemning those in his day that were living *according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience* (Eph 2:2). In the specific context of Jesus' life and times, *generation* was a reference to the Christ-rejecting, faithless Hebrews, for whom the scribes and Pharisees were the outspoken mouthpieces.
 - ii. Jesus calls them *evil* and *adulterous* as an allusion to the Old Testament passages that upbraided disobedient Israel for their _____ (e.g. Jer. 3:20; Isa 57:3). Though Israel was no longer idolatrous (in the sense of pagan deities) they were still unfaithful to God through their self-righteous legalism and unbelief. **Their last state was worse than their first** (more on this later).

APPLICATION➔ The Pharisees and scribes were moral (in many ways) but they were guilty of the worst of sins: **unbelief**. William Gurnall vividly portrays the danger of unbelief by describing it as "the _____ sin."³

Greater Witnesses Condemn

2. (vv 39-42) Jesus had already performed nearly every conceivable miracle, but there was one remaining: that of his own _____. And Christ's resurrection, apart from all of his other deeds, was the greatest miracle, not only to prove his authority, but to complete his mission.
3. Jesus referred to his resurrection as the *sign of Jonas* because *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*. Spurgeon draws further on this comparison:

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *An Exposition of Matthew, the Gospel of the Kingdom* (Springfield: Particular Baptist Press, 2015) 92.

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel, Volume One, Matthew, Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2007) 135.

³ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013) Part Second, 23.

“The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners; our Lord’s death made peace for us...The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Nineveh, and so does the risen Saviour demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom his message comes.”⁴

4. (vv 40-41) Jesus contrasts the irresponsible faithlessness of the Pharisees in two different ways:
- (a) A greater _____ - The people of Nineveh *shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas...*
 - (b) A greater _____ - *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it or she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon...*

APPLICATION➔ Ryle reminds us: “Our Lord speaks of the queen of the South, as a real, true person, who had lived and died. He refers to the story of Jonah, and his miraculous preservation in the whale's belly, as undeniable matters of fact. Let us remember this, if we hear men professing to believe the writers of the New Testament, and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament, as if they were fables. Such men forget, that **in so doing they pour contempt upon Christ Himself**. The authority of the Old and New Testament stands or falls together.”⁵

Greater Judgment Follows

5. (vv 43-45) After contrasting this wicked generation with the repentant Ninevites and the seeking Queen of Sheba, Jesus then compares their current spiritual condition to that of their Hebrew ancestors. He does this with the parable of a man whose soul (like a house) is indwelt by an unclean spirit:
- (a) The unclean spirit (of his own accord) leaves the man (notice the demon is not compelled). This is emblematic of superficial moral reformation instead of gracious _____.
 - (b) When the demon sees the sinner has “_____ up his life” (*he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished*) he fetches seven other demons more wicked than himself. They all possess the man, *and the last state of that man is worse than the first. **Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.***

APPLICATION➔ J. C. Ryle sums it up: “The grossness of idol-worship had given place to the deadness of mere _____. Seven other spirits worse than the first, had taken possession of them. Their last state was rapidly becoming worse than the first. Yet forty years, and their iniquity came to the full. They madly plunged into a war with Rome. Judæa became a very Babel of confusion. Jerusalem was taken. The temple was destroyed. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.”

Answer Key: key word(s) “generation” • 1. a) faith; b)ii) idolatry; ➔sin-making • 2. Resurrection • 4. A) prophet; b) wiseman • 5. A) transformation; b) cleaned; ➔ formality

⁴ Spurgeon, 93.

⁵ Ryle.