

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-41

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It is curious that Herod (Matthew 2:3-4) asked about the birth of Jesus. He inquired of the scribes and chief priests and demanded to know where Christ should be born. Why did he do this? The Bible teaches that he heard of the event somehow, perhaps through the wise men who came from the east; but note that he sought the counsel of the chief priests and the scribes. “*He demanded of them where Christ should be born.*” This may be better understood as a vigorous inquiry, but why did he appeal to these individuals?

Apparently, Herod knew who the authority was on this matter, and I would suggest that he had heard of the prophetic Messiah to come, and he was in one sense a believer that gave some credence to the history of the Jewish heritage. Why else would he have spent so much time and material wealth on the Temple complex in Jerusalem he constructed, if only to appease? (cf., Matthew 24:1). However, it is obvious that the “authorities” who sat in Moses’ seat also knew their scriptures. The answer given is the correct answer from the prophet Micah (Matthew 2:5-6; 23:2; Micah 5:2). “*In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda...*”. And thus the “sign” of Micah was confirmed and fulfilled whether believed or understood at the time.

Matthew’s account of the gospel of Jesus confirms many Old Testament prophecies. Some 15 times in his account he indicates fulfillment of prophecy. Cf., Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9. This is serious and worthy of evidential faith building conviction (cf., Hebrews 11:1).

Now, let us consider our topic concerning the “sign of Jonah” mentioned in Matthew 12:38-42. The scribes and Pharisees said: “*Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.*” The word sign literally means a sign, mark, token, that by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known. I want to demonstrate how Jesus will answer this request, but before I do so, let us note specific contexts this word is used in Matthew’s account:

- 1.) Matthew 12:38-39 – The sign of Jonah is the only sign an evil and adulterous generation will receive.
- 2.) Matthew 16:1-4 – Again, the Pharisees and Sadducees, tempting Jesus request a “*sign from heaven.*” Jesus’ rebuke simply demonstrates their hypocrisy being able to discern the weather and “*signs of the times,*” but they (as hypocrites) will receive no sign but that of Jonah again, and now mentioned twice in Matthew’s context.
- 3.) Matthew 24:3, 24, 30 – In the context with his disciples, after condemning Jerusalem’s hypocrisy in the previous chapter, they ask what the “*sign of His coming, and end of the age*” will look like. His answers are apocalyptic and prophetic about the destruction of Jerusalem that would take place in AD. 70 by the Roman armies. This sign would confirm the faith of many at that time still alive and who had been warned to flee Jerusalem.
- 4.) Matthew 26:48 – Judas Iscariot would give a “sign” by kissing the Son of God thus betraying Him. Perhaps you can see the usage and contexts surrounding this idea of a “sign.”

(continued next week)