

The Sign of Jonah the Prophet Easter 2006 (16 April)

One of the signs under which the Lord described his death and resurrection was the Prophet Jonah—swallowed by the great fish as a picture of the Lord's death and burial, and then raised to preach. Today we will consider this sign:

- the original statement of it in the gospels;
- the source of the imagery;
- the meaning of resurrection as a sign;
- the amazing hardness of heart that leads some people to reject it;
- how it is fulfilled in the church today.

The Fact of the Sign, Matt 12:39-41

<i>Matt 12</i>	<i>Matt 16</i>	<i>Mark 8</i>	<i>Luke 11</i>
38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.	1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.	11 And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.	29 And when the people were gathered thick together,
	2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, <i>It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.</i> 3 And in the morning, <i>It will be foul weather: for the sky is red and lowring.</i> O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not <i>discern</i> the signs of the times?		
39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign;	4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign;	12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign?	he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign;
and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:	and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.	verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.	and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.
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.			30 For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.
41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas <i>is</i> here.			32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas <i>is</i> here.
42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this			31 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the

Matt 12	Matt 16	Mark 8	Luke 11
generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon <i>is</i> here.			men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon <i>is</i> here.
<discourse on unclean spirit>	And he left them, and departed.	13 And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.	<discourse on light of the body>

Apparently, the Lord gave this example on two occasions. Matthew records both instances, Luke the former, and mark the latter (though Robertson argues that Luke is distinct from Matt 12 and happens last of all).

Evil and adulterous generation.--Not a period of time, but a race of people.

- “Evil” because they disobeyed God's law
- “adulterous” because they dishonored the covenant that God had established with them.

Seeketh after a sign.--As Paul discerned, 1 Cor 1:22, “the Jews seek after a sign.”

Sign of the prophet Jonah.--It's worth clarifying both the *recipients* of the sign and its *form*.

Recipients: See Luke 11:30, “Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites.” Not the sailors, not Jonah himself, but those to whom he preached after emerging from the fish.

Form: Matthew relates it to Jonah's being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. But this in and of itself would not be a sign to the Ninevites. They lived far from the ocean. The sign is that he was *only* there for three days and three nights; that he was restored to life after this time and afterward appeared to the Ninevites. Calvin: “he will be their prophet after that he is risen from the dead.”

The Source of the Sign, Ezek 37:12-14

12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, 14 And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD.

What suggested to the Lord that Jonah would be a good sign of his Messiahship? Ezekiel predicted that resurrection would be an evidence of the Messianic age, with the concomitant gift of the spirit, per ch. 36.

Note that in fact when the Lord died and arose, many others rose with him, Matt 27:52, 53.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. 51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; 52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

So the idea that resurrection would herald the coming of the Messiah was a very Jewish one, but using Jonah emphasized the wickedness of the people to whom the sign was given. By citing Jonah, he implicitly compares his audience with Ninevites.

The Meaning of the Sign, Acts 17:31

he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

In his sermon on Mars Hill, Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus is God's way of giving assurance to all men that he will judge the world in righteousness by his designated man.

Note: The idiom pistin parecw does indeed mean "give assurance" as in AV, not (as Meyer) "grant faith". The idiom is common in Josephus, always in this sense: Ant 2:218; 15:260; 16:188; cf. 18:337; Apion 2:43; 2:218.

Just what is the proposition to which this sign gives support? We can distinguish at least three elements from Paul's statement (following Rackham):

that man whom he hath ordained.--The resurrection of Christ is first of all God's mark distinguishing him out from all other men. Rom 1:4, "declared *to be* the powerful Son of God, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." "Declared" in Rom 1:4 and "ordained" here are the same Greek word. As a man, he partakes of the weakness of our flesh, but the resurrection shows that God has endowed him with power and authority.

he will judge the world.--Not the *kosmos* (as in John 12:32, which was judged at the Lord's death), but the *oikoumenh*, the inhabited earth. Not the system, but the people who live in it; humankind collectively. How can God judge humankind, many of whom have already died? Answer: because resurrection is a fact, which has been demonstrated by the resurrection of the Lord. Compare the argument in 1 Cor 15:22, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." If there were no resurrection, people might think that death ends it all. But the Lord's resurrection shows that even those who have passed on can be held accountable, in their bodies.

in righteousness.--It is righteous for God to judge the world, because he has provided salvation for all who will receive it, leaving those who reject it without excuse. The resurrection lies at the heart of the gospel, and it is part of every gospel presentation in Acts. Rom 4:25, he was "raised for [because of] our justification." It shows that our sin, which had carried the Lord into the grave, is gone. It can no longer hold him, and thus it can no longer hold us. It is entirely righteous for God to bring judgment on any who reject such a wonderful provision.

The Rejection of the Sign

One can hardly imagine a more striking sign than the resurrection of a dead man after several days. Yet those who are hardened to the Lord manage to reject even such evidence as this.

The Lord prophesied such rejection in his account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The rich man, in torment in hell, asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house (v. 27), so that he could

warn the rich man's brothers. Abraham refers them to the Scriptures (29). The rich man persists:

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.
31 And [Abraham] said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

In John 5, the Lord ordered the witnesses to him as first John the Baptist, second the signs, and third the attestation of God through the Scriptures. If they reject the greatest of these, the signs will do no good.

In fact, we see this hardness of heart with respect to resurrection in the Jews.

Efforts of the Jews to hide the fact of resurrection:

- attempted to kill Lazarus, John 12:10-11
- tried to conceal the fact of Jesus' resurrection, Matt 28:12

The Fulfillment of the Sign

Christ promised that the Jews would see his sign:

Luke 11:30, "as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation."

Yet he did not reveal himself to unbelievers after his resurrection, only to his disciples. So how was his promise fulfilled, to show the Jews his sign?

The answer is likely that the believers are the means by which he would be seen. The church, as the body of Christ, is the resurrection sign. "Witnesses of his resurrection," Acts 1:22.

Rom 6 makes clear that we have died with Christ and are risen with him. We are all resurrected individuals, and we are to confront our world with the unavoidable authority and power of those who are alive from the dead.

Romans 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be **dead** indeed unto sin, but **alive** unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13 Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are **alive from the dead**, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God.

Galatians 2:20 I am **crucified** with Christ: nevertheless I **live**; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 **Buried** with him in baptism, wherein also ye are **risen** with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were **dead** in sins, hath **quickened** us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.