

Focus Text

"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." (Matthew 12:38–42, ESV)

1. No Sign But Jonah

"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." **(Matthew 12:38–39, ESV)**

After the harsh verbal lashing Jesus has given the Pharisees for being callous to the people they are called to love and lead closer to God, they speak, seeking a spiritual sign from Jesus. We're not told what specific sign they wanted; however, we can assume something that would confirm His authority to be called "The Son of David." Jesus has already performed countless miracles for them. The rumors of Jesus' spiritual authority and power would be in circulation. Was calming the wind and waves not sufficient for them? This author's interpretation leans toward the idea that the sign they may have hoped for would be Jesus' conquest of the Romans and the renunciation of the Gentile occupation. Jesus' most troubling attribute has been the company He keeps. He has been seen eating and drinking with tax collectors and "sinners," meaning Gentiles after all. The Pharisees have been unimpressed by Jesus' desire to heal, save, and include anyone who approaches Him. The Pharisees are seeking a "sign" to fulfill their expectations of who the Messiah was supposed to be. Jesus isn't living up to what they pictured, and now they are demanding a "sign."

There's a popular T-shirt that says "Jesus is my Co-Pilot," signifying that Jesus rides with me in the car. The theological problem with this statement is the implication that Jesus is welcome to give advice, but I am still the pilot of my life, and I will personally decide what's best. However, Jesus is the King of His Kingdom. Christians submit to Christ, Jesus is my Lord and Master, not my co-pilot. The Pharisees are seeking to form Jesus into their image. Jesus is making it crystal clear that He isn't going to fit their expectations because He is the Lord of all creation. The T-shirt should read, "Jesus is the Pilot."

2. The Signs of Resurrection

"For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (**Matthew 12:40, ESV**)

Jesus reveals that Jonah's being swallowed by the giant fish and then hurled onto the shores of Ninevah serves a much larger purpose in God's plan of salvation. Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish that out of the belly of Sheol (the place of the dead), and God heard his voice. Jonah also prayed that "salvation belongs to the Lord." The Jewish community would know that Jesus is pointing toward Jonah's prayer of salvation and that Jonah was in the darkness, and God saved him. Jesus then compares Jonah's fishy trial to being buried in the heart of the earth for three days. Like Jonah, Jesus is referring to Sheol, the place of the dead. It wouldn't be a stretch to rephrase this as Jesus saying he would be deep in the dirt for three days and then, like Jonah, the earth would spit Jesus back out.

The world will never forget the story of Jesus' resurrection. The Angel in Luke's story tells the disciples that Jesus is Risen just as he had told them. This is one of those moments when Jesus reveals God's master plan to anyone who will listen. God plans to save Jesus from the grave.

"He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." (**Luke 24:6-7, ESV**)

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came

to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."

(Jonah 2:1-10, ESV)

3. Greater than Jonah

"The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." **(Matthew 12:41, ESV)**

Jesus then drops a massive insult on the Pharisees. He claims that if the pagan Assyrians could see the extent of their rejection, they would condemn them. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria during the time of Jonah, and the Assyrians were Israel's greatest rival at the time. Jesus is pointing out that Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria during the time of Jonah, and the Assyrians were Israel's greatest rival. The Assyrians were also the people who received Jonah as a prophet of God, and the pagans repented after hearing Jonah's message. They listened to God through Jonah. Jonah never healed, cast out demons, or resurrected anyone. Jesus, who is greater than a prophet because He is the Messiah, has proven His identity with signs and wonders beyond what any normal prophet could do.

Secondly, Jesus is making the divine claim to be greater than just a prophet. Jesus is taking hold of the title "Messiah." If Jesus can stay in the dirt for three days and come back out, He really is the Son of God.

"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them." **(Jonah 3:5, ESV)**

4. Greater than Solomon

"The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

(Matthew 12:42, ESV)

Finally, Jesus reminds the people of an exchange between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, the third king of Israel. We don't know who this queen is, more than likely she was the Queen of Ethiopia. Solomon is trying to renegotiate trade routes to the south in her territory, so she comes to speak with him. But, the larger reason she's come is because Solomon was known as the wisest man in the world because of God's blessing.

She marveled at Solomon’s ability to tackle hard questions, proof that God had blessed him with abundant wisdom. Once again, this pagan queen would judge the Israelites for rejecting Jesus, because He showed more scriptural wisdom than Solomon.

Jesus is noting here that He is greater than a king. He’s the Messiah, and all Solomon had was wisdom, and yet this pagan princess was overwhelmed by God’s blessing. Jesus has done far more than Solomon could imagine. He is the Messiah, who has come to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

“Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind.” **(1 Kings 10:1-2, ESV)**

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(2 Chronicles 9:1, ESV)

“The Queen of Sheba was a figure of considerable wealth, beauty, and authority[1], though her identity remains historically uncertain. Biblical scholars generally locate Sheba in either Ethiopia or Yemen, and while external evidence about her monarchy is scarce, she clearly ruled independently and held reservations about the religious practices of her own kingdom[1].

Her journey to Jerusalem was motivated by reports of Solomon’s renown and his relationship with God, prompting her to challenge him with difficult questions[1]. Solomon’s divinely granted wisdom enabled him to answer all her inquiries[1], and she expressed admiration for his responses, his hospitality, and his widespread reputation[1]. Beyond testing his intellect, her visit likely served a practical diplomatic purpose—negotiating a trade agreement, since Solomon’s control of caravan routes threatened Sheba’s traditional commercial income[2]. The encounter concluded with an exchange of gifts, after which she returned home with her entourage[1].

The historical identity of the Queen of Sheba has sparked considerable speculation. Non-biblical sources suggest she bore Solomon’s child in secret,

and some commentators propose she appears in the Song of Solomon, though both claims remain speculative and unverifiable[1]. Ethiopian tradition identifies her son as Menelik I and uses this connection to support Ethiopia's claim to religious succession from ancient Israel[3]. While the biblical text never names her, some scholars identify her with Queen Makeda of Ethiopia[4]. Ultimately, the Queen of Sheba remains an enigmatic figure whose biblical account emphasizes her intelligence and diplomatic acumen rather than the romanticized portrayals that have dominated later cultural representations."¹

Application

"Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." (Luke 9:18–20, ESV)

Jesus did what He said He would. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then will you answer like Peter? Our church believes that Jesus was resurrected bodily, this wasn't a metaphor, or anything other than Jesus doing what He said that He would.

This week, do something for Jesus with confidence. Pray with someone you've prayed with. Talk to someone about God's work in your life. Puff your chest with confidence in Jesus. He told the crowd he would be resurrected, and if that happened, he would be greater than a king or a prophet. Jesus is alive, we can be bold for Him! Because He is the Son of God! Amen.

¹ [1] Got Questions Ministries, [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2002–2013). [See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#).]

[2] D. A. Hubbard, "[Sheba, Queen of.](#)" in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), [1088](#).

[3] David L. Jeffrey, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992). [See [here](#).]

[4] Elizabeth Geitz, *Spiritual Truth in the Age of Fake News* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019). [See [here](#).]