

The Sign of Jonah - Expanded

Second Edition

To the unbelievers Christ gave the Sign of Jonah as proof of His deity and ministry. Was Christ in the belly of the earth for three days **and** three nights? Was it from Friday to Sunday? We must get the sequence right and discover a deeper message!

There is much more to the Sign of
Jonah!

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Introduction

In the Gospel writings we read of Jesus proclaiming that He would fulfil the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, so would Jesus also be in the belly of the earth, and be resurrected.

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we want to see a sign from you.

But He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. And there shall be no sign given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
(Matthew 12:38-40, MKJV)

Jesus fulfilled that sign. Miraculously He was resurrected after three days and three nights, or 72 hours. And we may think that is all there is to it. There is actually a lot more than what at first seems to be the case!

There are many more similarities between this event in the Prophet Jonah’s life and Jesus’ ministry. And

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then even the days are miscalculated by most churches, leading to confusion as to the timespan. For some it may even lead to their downfall in their professing Christianity. For the question is valid: how can we fit three days and three nights between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, or is it Monday? If we look carefully at the Gospel accounts, neither these practices actually fits the scriptures!

It is time to solve the mystery, and expand the knowledge about the significance and implications of the fulfilment of the Sign of Jonah.

Chapter 1

Jonah's experience

Jonah was a prophet during the times of the kings of Israel. Most readers of the Bible will not remember him as one of the prophets of God that had an influence on the history of Israel. But his influence made a difference and he was important, and had influence over the kings.

We see Jonah mentioned in one verse in the book of Kings:

“He restored the border of Israel from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain, according to the Word of Jehovah, the God of Israel which He spoke by the hand of his servant **Jonah**, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.”
(2 Kings 14:25, MKJV)

In this prophet's life something dramatic was going to happen. Some of his actions may seem to be in defiance of God's clear instructions. However a deeper investigation into the background may reveal why Jonah was not keen to fulfil God's will this time.

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We can pick up the story from the beginning of the book of Jonah.

“And the Word of Jehovah came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their evil has come up before Me.”
(Jonah 1:1-2, MKJV)

And so whereas Jonah was delivering messages to the kings of Jerusalem before, now he had to deliver a message to Niniveh, the enemy of Israel.

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah. And he went down to Joppa. And he found a ship going to Tarshish. And he gave its fare, and went down into it, in order to go with them to Tarshish, away from the sight of Jehovah.”
(Jonah 1:3, MKJV)

This was a strange decision. Jonah tried to run away from his assignment. We will see later why that happened. However, God’s purposes will stand, and Jonah would be forced to do God’s Will. You see, God is not only concerned with Israel, He has been concerned over all mankind, and in this case wanted to give Niniveh an opportunity to repent. We will see how God would force Jonah to do as he was told.

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“But Jehovah hurled a great wind into the sea, and there was a great storm in the sea, so that the ship was thought to be broken.

Then the seamen were afraid, and each man cried to his god. And they threw out the ship's articles in the ship, into the sea in order to lighten it. But Jonah had gone down into the hold of the ship; and he lay there, and was fast asleep.

And the chief of the seaman came to him and said to him, What is it to you, O sound sleeper? Arise, call upon your God! It may be that our god will notice us, and we will not perish.

And they said, each one to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots, so that we may know who has caused this evil to occur to us. And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Then they said to him, Please tell us, for what reason this evil has come on us. What is your business? And where do you come from? Where is your country? And of what people are you?

And he said to them, I am a Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land.

Then the men were afraid with a great fear. And they said to him, What is this you have done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from before the face of Jehovah, because he had told them.”

(Jonah 1:4-10, MKJV)

So now the truth was out, and they all know what was going on. Jonah understood that he had done very wrong, and saw no way out but to die.

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“Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm to us? For the sea was going on and being stormy.

And he said to them, Take me up and throw me out into the sea. And the sea shall be calm to you; for I know that this great storm has come on you for my sake.

But the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not, for the sea was going on and being stormy against them.

And they cried to Jehovah and said, We beg You, O Jehovah, we beg You, let us not perish for this man's life, and do not lay on us innocent blood. For You, O Jehovah, have done as it pleased You.

And they lifted Jonah up and threw him out into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.”

(Jonah 1:11-15, MKJV)

Now the people in the ship understood who they were dealing with. However even when Jonah saw no way out but death, God still saw opportunities, and would work miracles. See the dramatic effect on the boatmen, and how they repented.

“Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to Jehovah, and vowed vows. And Jehovah had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

(Jonah 1:16-17, MKJV)

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Now followed the miracle of Jonah's resurrection and deepest repentance.

“And Jonah prayed to Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly,

and he said, I cried to Jehovah from my distress.

And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried for help, and You heard my voice.

For You cast me into the depths of the seas, and the current surrounded me. All Your breakers and Your waves passed over me.

Then I said, I am cast off from Your eyes, yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.

Waters encompassed me, even to the soul; the depth closed around me; the seaweed was bound to my head.

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was around me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God.

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; and my prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple.

They who take heed to lying vanities forsake their kindness;

but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will fulfill that which I have vowed. Salvation belongs to Jehovah!”

(Jonah 2:1-9, MKJV)

So, after the deepest and most desperate repentance, God would give Jonah another chance. In fact God

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would give Nineveh another chance to live, for up to this point Nineveh was as good as gone.

“And Jehovah spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out on the dry land.”
Jonah 2:10, MKJV)

This is significant, as the people of Nineveh apparently had pagan belief systems, some worshiping the creation such as big fish. Hence when people at the beach saw Jonah coming out of the fish, they must have been overcome with awe. Jonah could not have asked for a better introduction! Imagine the stories that would quickly spread through the communities!

“And the Word of Jehovah came to Jonah the second time, saying,
Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out to it the proclamation that I am declaring to you.
And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the Word of Jehovah. And Nineveh was a very great city of three days' journey.
And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”
(Jonah 3:1-4, MKJV)

The number 3 and 40 is significant. Three indicates completeness, and forty indicates trial and testing, which may lead to repentance. We will deal with

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the significance later in subsequent chapters. The numbers carry a message!

Understand that up to this point Jonah prophesied to Jerusalem and its kings. This was rather a prophecy to a pagan country. Would they listen? What did Nineveh do?

“And the people of Nineveh believed God. And they called a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came to the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne. And he laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he cried out and said in Nineveh by the decree of the king and his great ones, saying, Do not let man or beast, herd or flock taste anything; do not let them feed, nor drink water. But let man and animal be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God. And let them each one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? He may repent, and God may have pity and turn away from the glow of His anger, so that we do not perish. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God was compassionate over the evil that He had said to do to them, and He did not do it.”
(Jonah 3:5-10, MKJV)

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Unlike some of the kings of Jerusalem, the king of Nineveh humbled himself and had the whole city repent towards their Creator! This was great news for Jonah! Or was it?

“But it was a great calamity in Jonah's sight, and it kindled anger in him.”

(Jonah 4:1, M KJV)

Amazing! One would have thought that a prophet would be glad to see that his preaching bear fruit. Somehow it was not for Jonah! We will see later on why.

“And he prayed to Jehovah and said, Please, O Jehovah, was this not my saying when I was still in my land? On account of this I fled before to Tarshish. For I knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and One who repents over calamity.

And now, O Jehovah, I beseech You, take my life from me. For better is my death than my life.

And Jehovah said, Is anger rightly kindled in you?”

(Jonah 4:4, MKJV)

Amazing? How can we understand Jonah's attitude? We can clearly see a nationalistic desire that override his compassion on mankind in general. He was not like Jesus. That was clear. Jesus loved everybody equally. However we will see later why Jonah had this attitude, from which he had to

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repent. God had to move Jonah to further repentance.

“And Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east of the city. And he made himself a booth there and sat under it in the shade, until he might see what would happen in the city.”

(Jonah 4:5, MKJV)

And so Jonah still hoped that the people of Nineveh would be as unrepentant as some of Jerusalem. However he would have had to wait forty days to observe the final outcome. In the meantime God would work with Jonah’s attitude problem.

“And Jehovah God prepared a plant, and it came up over Jonah, to be shade over his head, in order to deliver him from his misery. And Jonah rejoiced with great joy over the plant.

But God prepared a worm as the morning dawned the next day. And it struck the plant, and it withered.

And it happened when the sun shone, God ordained a scorching east wind. And the sun beat on the head of Jonah, so that he fainted. And he asked for his life to die. And he said, Better is my death than my life.

And God said to Jonah, Is your anger rightly kindled over the plant? And he said, My anger is rightly kindled, even to death.

And Jehovah said, You have had pity on the plant, for which you had not labored, nor made it grow,

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which was a son of a night, and perished the son of a night.

And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than a hundred and twenty thousand men who do not know between their right and their left hand, besides much cattle?”

(Jonah 4:6-11, MKJV)

God prepared a wonder tree to cover Jonah from the heat of the day. Jonah was impressed with this miracle and it cheered him that God was still doing miracles for him. Jonah could sit under the tree and wait the days over to see what would happen. Perhaps the tree even had good fruit. Indications are that it may have produced grapes of some sort. However the next morning the tree withered and died. The fruit dried up and the leaves fell off. This was a bad omen for Jonah. Why would God do such a wonderful thing only to let it be destroyed?

The lesson was for Jonah that a city and its inhabitants were a wonderful thing. It provides protection and nourishment for its people. The city really belongs to God, and He has every right to keep it from destruction. Jonah was deeply unhappy about his protection and nourishment that came and was taken away. How would the people of the city feel if their support and nourishment infrastructure was taken away for no reason, even after they repented?

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In this we can see the mercy of God. He is concerned for all people, not just Israel and Jerusalem.

But why did Jonah have these attitude problems? And what does this piece of history have to do with the ministry of Jesus, and Jerusalem?

And how do we fit 72 hours between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? And what must we learn from the numbers?

We will see in the next chapters.