

A Sign From God

Early in the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln wanted to free the slaves, but this was meaningless if the North lost the war. He asked God for a sign. Less than a week later, a package was intercepted with the Confederate battle plans, leading to an immediate attack by Union forces. At the Battle of Antietam, the North scored a decisive victory and Lincoln had his sign. On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.

Three Stages in Giving the Greatest Sign of All:

1. _____(Wanting) A Sign

- a. *“Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.’” Matthew 12:38.* Even though Jesus had already fulfilled dozens of prophecies and performed hundreds of miracles and healings, they still wanted more. They wanted a sign from heaven, a celestial sign, as given in Joshua 10:13, Joel 2:31, or Genesis 28:12.
- b. Jesus rebuked them for three reasons: 1) their hearts were filled with pride; 2) they had already rejected many previous signs; and 3) their request was insulting, an infringement on his sovereignty. If we wish to hear from God, we must seek him with obedience (Proverbs 3:5-6), wisdom (James 1:5), persistence (Isaiah 55:6-7), and faith (Matthew 21:22).
- c. Henry Blackaby, in *Experiencing God*, instructs believers to discern God’s will by looking for a convergence of guidance from 1) Scripture, 2) fellow believers, 3) the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and 4) circumstances.

2. _____(Getting) A Sign

- a. *“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except for the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Matthew 12:39-40.*
- b. Jonah foreshadowed Jesus in his descent into the sea, his being swallowed by the fish, and his deliverance (Jonah 2). While his body was in the grave, Jesus descended to Hades and proclaimed his victory (I Peter 3:18-20; Ephesians 4:9). Early Sunday morning his spirit returned to his body, which was instantly transformed into an immortal body (I Corinthians 15:51-54).
- c. The resurrection of Jesus Christ transformed Josh McDowell, who wrote *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. It transformed novelist Andrew Klavan, who wrote *The Great Good Thing*. It also transformed reporter Lee Strobel, whose book *The Case for Christ* was released as a movie on April 7.

3. _____(Responding) to the Sign

- a. *“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.” Matthew 12:41.* The Ninevites didn’t have the Scriptures and knew nothing of the true God. They heard of God from an angry, loveless prophet who performed no miracles, yet they still repented.
- b. The Jewish people were trained in God’s Word and knew it well. God sent his only Son with a message of love that was verified by hundreds of miracles. He was a son of Abraham and David, with impeccable credentials, yet the Jews decisively rejected him.
- c. *“The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.” Matthew 12:42.* Even the Queen of Sheba worshipped the true God, although she was a Gentile, a woman, a pagan, and an Arab.

The question today is “What will you do with this sign from God?” Jesus died for you, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. He wants to be the Lord of your life. What is your response? C.S. Lewis said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Discussion Questions

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1. Why was Abraham Lincoln seeking God for a sign? How did God answer his request? Do you think we should ask God for signs? Why or why not? Have you had a time in your life when you asked God for a sign? How did God respond? What did you learn from this experience?
2. Read Matthew 12:38-42. Why were the Pharisees asking for a sign? What sort of sign were they looking for, according to Matthew 16:1? What can we learn about signs from Joshua 10:13, Joel 2:31, and Genesis 28:12? Why did Jesus rebuke the Pharisees in Matthew 12:39? In what ways were they evil and adulterous? In what ways had they already rejected signs that Jesus had given them? Why was their request insulting given the fact that Jesus is the sovereign ruler of the universe (Colossians 1:15-17)? How did God appear to Elijah in I Kings 19:11-13? What are we taught in Proverbs 3:5-6 about guidance from God? What are we taught in James 1:5? In Isaiah 55:6-7? In Matthew 21:22? Do you think we should 'put out a fleece' as Gideon did in Judges 6:37? Why or why not? What four-stage process does Henry Blackaby counsel believers to go through as they search for guidance from the Lord?
3. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:39-40? How does Jonah's experience in Jonah 2 foreshadow the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus? What are we taught in I Peter 3:18-20 and Ephesians 4:9 about what Jesus did in his spirit after his body was laid in the grave? What happened when Jesus' spirit was reunited with his body early on Easter Sunday morning, according to I Corinthians 15:51-54? How did the resurrection of Jesus Christ impact the life of Josh McDowell? The life of Andrew Klavan? The life of Lee Strobel? How has it impacted your life?
4. What did Jesus say in Matthew 12:41 about how the Ninevites responded to the sign that was given them compared to how the Pharisees responded? Why were the Ninevites unlikely to believe? Why was Jonah a poor representative of God? Why should the Jewish people be much more likely to respond positively to Jesus? Why is Jesus a much better representative of God than Jonah? How did the Queen of the South respond in a more favorable way than the Jews did in the time of Christ – see verse 42?
5. What will you do with this sign from God – the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the grave? Have you ever been guilty of not seeing the truth because you didn't want to see the truth? How did that happen? What did you learn? What did C.S. Lewis say about the importance of Christianity, if it is true? Do you believe that?