

**(Matt. 12:38)** – *“MASTER, WE WOULD SEE A SIGN FROM THEE”* – The Pharisees had been outwitted, exposed, and denounced by Christ as self-righteous legalists whose pious appearance earned them a good reputation with the multitudes who were impressed with their outward display of piety. He exposed them to be false shepherds who did not know the true God and the true Messiah. What further signs could the Pharisees need to verify that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh? He had healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, cast out demons, fed thousands, and raised the dead, yet they had the audacity to ask for more evidence to validate His claim. Their request was not only a pretense, it was insulting and revealed their steadfast unwillingness to believe Him regardless of the proofs of Who He was. They deliberately closed their eyes and refused to acknowledge the many miracles which affirmed Jesus of Nazareth to be the promised Messiah.

**(Matt. 12:39)** – *“BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM, AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION SEEKETH AFTER A SIGN; AND THERE SHALL NO SIGN BE GIVEN TO IT, BUT THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAS:”* – The people of our Lord’s day were ungodly and unfaithful to the Lord, and it was typical of them to seek a sign (1 Cor. 1:22). Unbelief always insists upon more evidence whereas faith embraces the bare Word of God (Rom. 10:17). In fact, seeing a miracle cannot produce faith in Christ Jesus. Not even being an eyewitness to the resurrection of Christ could create faith (Luke 16:30-31). True faith is a gift of God produced through a divine operation of grace (Eph. 1:19; 2:8-9).

**(Matt. 12:40)** – *“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”* – As the Lord spoke of the *“sign of the prophet Jonas,”* it is notable to see how He placed His stamp of approval on the Old Testament record of the prophet Jonah. It was no myth or fictional story that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:17), but a real historical event. As Jonah was cast overboard by the sailors which resulted in their physical salvation (Jonah 1:1:15), even so the Lord Jesus was cast out of the city by the Jews and crucified (Heb. 13:12), but His death meant the eternal salvation of all those in whose stead He laid down His life (John 12:32-33; Heb. 10:14). As Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, so the Son of Man would be swallowed by the earth. As Jonah would dwell for three days in the depths of the sea and then come forth (Jonah 2:9-10), so Christ would dwell for three days in the tomb and then rise triumphantly (Matt. 28:6). As the return of Jonah meant deliverance for the people of Ninevah (Jonah 3:10), so the resurrection of Christ meant eternal deliverance for all those in whose stead He died (Rom. 4:25).

**(Matt. 12:41)** – Christ promised that the repentant Ninevites (Gentiles) would *“RISE IN JUDGMENT, AND SHALL CONDEMN”* (testify against) the unbelieving Jews. The Ninevites repented at Jonah’s preaching, and Jonah, though a prophet, was a mere man (Jonah 3:5-9). The Jews to whom the Lord Himself (God manifest in the flesh and the Messiah) spoke refused to believe Him though He was (and is) infinitely *“GREATER THAN JONAH.”* Jonah and the other prophets pointed sinners to Him (Luke 24:25,44; John 1:45).

**(Matt. 12:42)** – The Queen of Sheba would join the Ninevites in testifying against these unbelieving Jews. She heard of the wisdom of Solomon, sought and found him and sat at his feet to learn truth from him (1 King 10:1-3). Christ was (and is) infinitely *“GREATER THAN SOLOMAN.”* The Lord testified of the superior wisdom of Solomon, but Christ Himself is the very embodiment of the wisdom of God in the salvation of sinners by God’s free and sovereign grace through His righteousness alone (Prov. 8; 1 Cor. 1:29-31).

**(Matt. 12:43-44)** – To understand this saying of our Lord, consider what He would tell the Pharisees in *Matthew 23:15* – *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”* The Jews sought to make Gentiles converts to their religion and bring them under the law to be moral and religious in seeking to establish a righteousness before God. This is religious abomination and death. An *“UNCLEAN SPIRIT”* may be said to leave a person when he makes an outward reformation and he becomes moral and religious though he remains void of the truth and grace of God in Christ. In such a case, the unclean spirit is not cast out by Christ but merely left temporarily – *“I WILL RETURN INTO MY HOUSE FROM WHENCE I CAME OUT; AND WHEN HE IS COME, HE FINDETH IT EMPTY, SWEEPED, AND GARNISHED.”* The person who has been reformed by law and religion remains empty of God’s power and grace in Christ. Though he now appears outwardly righteous before men, his heart is still wicked and depraved (Matt. 23:28).

**(Matt. 12:45)** – The unclean spirit then takes *“SEVEN OTHER SPIRITS MORE WICKED THAN HIMSELF,”* and they reenter and indwell the person reformed by religion but not by God’s grace. *“AND THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST. EVEN SO SHALL IT BE ALSO UNTO THIS WICKED GENERATION”* – What could be worse? A sinner who has been led astray and entrenched in false religious experiences and professions is, in his state, much worse off than he was before. His sin is now cloaked in a pretense of religion, an outward appearance of righteousness and spirituality unaccompanied by a renewed mind and heart with no true God-given life, faith, or repentance. The Jews were being led by a group of Christ-hating but religious teachers who had taught them self-righteous, legal religion but not the true Gospel of God’s grace in Christ.