

## QUEEN OF THE SOUTH

*Scripture citations are to the KJV unless stated otherwise*

– Matthew 12: 38-42 –

**38** Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. **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 [*except*] the sign of the prophet Jonas: **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. **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 is here. **42** The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this 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 is here. [*see parallel passage at Luke 11: 29-32; narrative is in different order*]

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**THE STATEMENT** in Matt. 12: 38 that the scribes Pharisees ‘answered’ is more accurately translated, *responded*; that is, they were opening a debate with Jesus. From Him they wanted a sign – or, ‘sign upon sign’ (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*), as they were by now aware of Christ’s miracles and wonders by which God authenticated His ministry.

Derisively, their spokesman addresses Him as ‘Master’ (Gk., *didaskale*, ‘teacher’): ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign [some token of proof] from you’. Our Lord’s rejoinder castigates them as belonging to an ‘evil and adulterous’ generation (*nation*). The feminine, *adulteress*, is apropos here:

Marriage and adultery are used symbolically for the relationship between Yahweh and his people in Hosea [2: 2; *cf.*, Jer. 36: 31, 32; Isa. 54: 5]. When Israel began to sacrifice to strange gods, the nation acted as an adulteress who leaves her husband and plays the prostitute with other men. (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Verlyn D. Verbrugge, 2000, Zondervan Corp., p. 376.)

As the leaders of that particular ‘generation’ the Scribes/Pharisees collectively represented the nation of Israel, *wife* of Jehovah. On several occasions Jesus rebuked them for their lack of constancy with regard to the founding principles of their nation as instituted by God, and to which the nation had assented.[**Note 1**]

### First Sign: Jonah

Jesus replies to the call for proof:-

. . . there shall no sign be given . . . [*except*] the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was [*parts of, Ed.*] three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be [*parts of, Ed.*] three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Our Lord here affirms the veracity (*credibility*) of the account of Jonah and the fish. He establishes a correlation between Jonah’s being in the creature’s belly for *the same period of time* as His own (future) confinement in the power of Roman authority (‘heart of the earth’). Jonah’s being vomited forth by the fish types Jesus’ expulsion from the death condition, ‘for death was not able to hold him in its grip’ (*Evangelical Heritage Version*). The parallel underpins Jonah’s status as ‘prophet’ and informed Jesus Himself of what to expect. In short, Jonah’s plight forecast the *inevitability* of Christ’s (a) death and (b) resurrection.

Are we to understand, then, that as Jesus was dead in the grave for parts of three days and nights that the obverse is also true: that Jonah was also dead? No. Jonah was a type of Christ *only as to the duration of time* in which they both were confined. Likewise, Isaac served to *typify* the death of Christ, but Isaac himself was not put to death. See Heb. 11: 17-19; Abraham received Isaac back to life ‘*in a figure*’ (type).

This ‘sign’ or evidence, drawn from Israel’s *past*, but pointing to the Christ in their midst, will have taken the Jewish clergy off guard. They knew the story of Jonah, but the link in their Scriptures between the prophet and the man who now stood before them would not have occurred to them, their being unable to extrapolate the Jonah incident to the death and raising to life of the Messiah.

Continuing:-

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 is here.

The repentance of the citizens of Nineveh attested the power of Jonah’s preaching and put to shame the scepticism of the Scribes/Pharisees. ‘For now’, Jesus says, ‘one greater than Jonah, is here before you: *it is I*’. The contrast to be drawn is the exemplary repentance of the ancient Ninevites – their figuratively ‘rising in judgment’ – standing up as witnesses to accuse the Jewish clerics, obdurate in their own rejection of Jesus.

### **Second Sign: The Queen of the South**

The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this 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 is here.

The reference is to the Queen of Sheba, who travelled a great distance to see Solomon, scarcely believing the reports she had received at court of his superior wisdom and opulence.[**Note 2**]

How much effort were the Jewish people and their leaders prepared to go – to understand and accept what Jesus had to teach them? ‘Behold, a greater than Solomon is here: *It is I*.’

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### **Notes**

[1] A covenant is a promise, a contractual arrangement, of a more or less formal nature. The principle of the covenant is found in law and in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

There are two main categories of covenants. Conditional and *Unconditional* (one-party, uni-lateral, or promissory). Firstly, the *conditional*, an ‘if’ or *bi-lateral* covenant – a contract made between *two* parties, each of whom agrees to adhere to the stipulations of the arrangement. Such contracts may be written or oral, and invariably include adverse sanctions – penalties for breaching the terms.

A commonplace example of this type of contract is a lease or rental of a flat or house, in which continuance of residence is dependent upon making regular payments. In the biblical sphere, the Jewish Law Covenant is probably the best illustration of a conditional covenant, not unlike a marriage, as noted in the article. God would do such and such for Israel, *if* Israel obeyed the terms of the agreement. (Note that should *they* fail to do so, condign punishment

would follow; it will be seen that this Law Covenant was not made between equal parties.) Collective Israel did consent to the arrangement, *thus binding itself* to the terms (Ex. 24: 1-8; v. 3, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.')

[2] 1 Kings 10: 1-10, 13):-

**10** And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. **2** And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. **3** And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. **4** And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, **5** And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. **6** And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. **7** Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. **8** Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. **9** Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. **10** And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. . . . **13** And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants. [parallel account at 2 Chron. 9: 1-20]