

## 12:38

**Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered.** That requires us to ask the question, “What are they answering?” And they’re answering His words, Jesus spoke in verses 33 to 37. Well He spoke well before that but He told them in verse 36: But I say unto you, “That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

**Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master** (Teacher, Rabbi), **we would see a sign from Thee.** I guess casting a devil out of a blind, dumb man wasn’t a sign.

## 12:39

And Jesus says, **there shall no sign be given to this wicked and evil and adulterous generation but the sign of the prophet Jonas.**<sup>1</sup> Which is Jonah. You probably, many of you, in your laps probably have Jonah.

## 12:40

**For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly;** It appears to be the only time the word whale is used in the entire New Testament. That is why some versions say “great fish.” The word comes from a Greek word that means a gaping fish.

**so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.** Is it three days and three nights total? Is it 72 hours? If so, how will you get 72 hours between Good Friday afternoon and Sunday before dawn?”

*Esther 4:15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink **three days, night or day**: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. Now it came to pass **on the third day**, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house.*

She’s standing before the king on the third **day**, and she says here that it would be after **three days and three nights** that she would go to the king. Now how is it possible to say it will be three days and three nights and yet it will take place on the third day?

*Matthew 16:21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again **the third day**.*

Now, how can both passages of Scripture be true? How can this be true that says that He’ll be raised the third day, and the one we’re examining here in chapter 12 that says He’ll be in the grave **three days and three**

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 8:12 does not contain this “sign.” He is the only one that does not mention the sign of Jonah. In other words, mentioning the sign of Jonah may have been meaningless to Mark’s audience. Mark wrote to somebody. What if the people he wrote to didn’t know anything about Jonah? So why introduce it and get them thinking about something else?

It’s like me looking at my three children one day and saying, “We will not be going anywhere this summer except for Grandma’s house.” One child says to her boss at work, “We’re not going anywhere this summer except for a week in July.” Why would her boss care? He’s got to work that schedule. Child #2 tells his soccer coach “We’re not going anywhere this summer except for just under a week in July.” Why would the soccer coach care? He needs to build practices around the individual roles of the players. The third child tells the neighbor girl, “We’ll be here all summer.” It’s generally true. It’s mostly true. It’s so true it’s virtually true. It’s functionally true. It’s essentially true. The neighbor girl can count on Leah to be around all summer, generally. The neighbor girl could be around so much that from the beginning of the three-month summer it’s good enough to say, “We’re going nowhere,” when vacation constitutes a mere 8% of the summer. So it could be that to Mark’s audience it was generally true. There was no sign going to be given to this generation because his audience was completely uninterested and completely unaware of the sign of Jonah.

**nights?** Yet we see in Esther that somehow in the Jewish mindset it was possible for three days and three nights to somehow still be true as well as her entering “on the third day.”

*By Jewish reckoning a part of a day was considered to be a whole day. And it was common Jewish idiom to refer to even a part of a day as a day and a night. So three days and three nights might refer to as much as seventy-two hours or as little as twenty-six. One full twenty-four hour day together with one hour of the preceding and one hour of the following. This explains why Jesus could be said to be in the tomb three days and three nights when He was buried late Friday and rose on early Sunday.<sup>2</sup>*

So if you can think like a Jewish person long enough to read this verse you realize that any part of Friday counted as a day and a night. Any part of Saturday counted as a day and a night. Any part of Sunday counted as a day and a night. So it is possible that He did die on Friday, having been raised from the dead just before dawn on Sunday.<sup>3</sup>

**Shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth** It either means exactly what it says or we have to find a pretty good reason for not thinking it means exactly what it says.

*Psalm 139 I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought **in the lowest parts of the earth.***

The Psalmist seems to be calling his mother’s womb the lowest parts of the earth. Many times in Jewish custom they saw the womb and the tomb both kind of the same; the womb is a sort of a tomb. And so the birth of a child was kind of like a resurrection, because there he is, hidden in a tomb so to speak, hidden in a womb, and he comes out at birth. The reality is, children often died before they were born and so it was a great thing when a child and a mother endured pregnancy and a child was delivered.

There’s another possibility.

*Ephesians 4:8: Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first **into the lower parts of the earth?** He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

It really looks like the writer of Ephesians is saying that the Lord went into the center of the earth, or the lower parts of the earth. Or is he using it in the same way that the writer of Psalm 139 was using it to refer to the tomb? I believe He went to the lower parts of the earth. See my commentary on Revelation (9:1).

## **12:41**

**The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented, they repented, at the preaching of Jonah;** One might allow for a reference of a fictional character named **Jonah** here, but the problem is that the folks of Nineveh are spoken of as nonfictional people that will take part in a future judgment. And so Jesus is referencing the people of Nineveh, they’ll be at the future judgment, then it doesn’t make any sense that Jonah didn’t exist. Jonah is one of many Old Testament personalities that have been mentioned in Matthew so far. He’s mentioned Moses and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in chapter 8, Elijah in chapter 11, David in chapter 12.

**and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.** And it seems like that goes well because in the first twelve or thirteen verses He’s telling them that He’s actually better than their Sabbath, and He’s better than their temple,

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart K. Weber, [Matthew](#), vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 179.

<sup>3</sup>Luke 24:21 does introduce another dilemma, having occurred on Sunday afternoon.

which means that He compares Himself with a priest. And so in the context He says, “I’m better than your priestly system, I’m better than your prophets, I’m better than your kings.” A very clear, very clear vein of thought Jesus is reintroducing in this passage: “I’m better than all of your anointed offices. I’m better than your best. You can’t do any better than me.”

*Acts 2:14 Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose... 22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because **it was not possible that Jesus should be held of it.***

Now think that through. Jesus couldn’t have stayed dead if He wanted to. That’s the eternal life you and I have promise of. I couldn’t die if I wanted to. As long as God lives, I live. I’m guaranteed infinity. *Colossians 3:1-4 You that are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. For when Christ, **who is our life**, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.*

I’m as alive as God is, for as long as God is, because He is, His life is in me. And so Jesus: it was not possible for Him to be held of death. He had to come alive. It’s almost as if, I’m going to give it away, it’s almost as if God spoke to the tomb and the tomb spit Him out.

*Jonah 1:17 The Lord prepared a great fish.*

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, Chapter 2: the entire chapter is a prayer from Jonah out of a fish. Look where Jonah says he is in 2:2. He said he was in “the belly of hell.” Jesus said they’re parallels. Jesus said Jonah was **a sign** of Him. Jesus, in Psalm 16 as quoted in Acts 2, said, “You’ll not leave My soul in hell.”

*Jonah 2:10 And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and **it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.***

Jonah couldn’t have stayed in the fish even if he wanted to. The Creator spoke to the fish and there was no discussion. It was impossible for Jonah to stay in the fish.

But it gets just a little better. What happens to a fish when it beaches itself? It dies. Jonah called the fish’s belly “hell.” What Jonah called “death” died, because God spoke. When God spoke, death died, and Christ was vomited out of the grave! Surely, **a greater than Jonah is here.**

**rise in judgment** I’d like you to also see that there’s the contextual connection of judgment.

*Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.*

*Matthew 10:15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in **the day of judgment.***

*Matthew 11:21-24 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment. 23 And*

*thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in **the day of judgment**.*

*Matthew 12:36 Out of every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in **the day of judgment**.*

Jesus is far more concerned about the day of judgment than typically we are. If Jesus believes that day is so dreadful that He will continually warn us, then I say to you we need an eternal perspective once again. Oh, I'm afraid we're not thinking eternally. Most of the time we're thinking about tomorrow, we're thinking about yesterday, and we're irritated at the things people are doing to us that are absolutely attached to time. Oh, but Jesus Christ has an eternal perspective and He's in no danger of the judgment. God help us! I hope that your choices are made with an eternal perspective. What will I wish I had done differently when I'm standing before Him?

Apparently, the people of that generation will stand at the judgment with great accountability, great accountability. And here's the scary thing: somehow people from this life will be at that judgment and quite possibly bear witness against you and I. You say, "Where do you get that from the text?" I don't. I get the possibility from the text. Jesus says the men of Nineveh will rise with this generation and condemn it. They're going to be witnesses at the judgment of that first century people. Only that generation can look forward to such things Biblically, but I wonder if by application America will give a special account for the riches that it has experienced, and the wisdom of God preached from pulpits, thousands, tens of thousands of pulpits, and they would not repent. I wonder.

**12:43-45**

**When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,**

*Matthew 12:22 Then was brought unto Him **one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb.***

**he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.**

*Matthew 11:29-30 Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and **ye shall find rest** unto your souls.*

*12:43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, **seeking rest, and findeth none.***

I'm trying to show you that Jesus and Matthew the writer have certain themes on their heart and mind, and this is exactly where it ought to be in the Scripture. Exactly where it ought to be.

**44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty,** Do you know why that demon found room in that house? Because there's no one in it.

**45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there:** I must say the fact that this demon was able to go back into the house because there was no strong man there from his exorcism leads me to believe that you need not worry about demon possession if the Spirit of Christ, lives in you. If you want a good reason to get saved, here's two in the passage: There's a coming judgment day in which there will be witnesses; two: you are, best I can tell, guaranteeing yourself you will never be victimized by demon possession. You have a pretty good chance of staying in your mind and having clear thoughts if you can guarantee that you'll never be demon possessed.

**and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.** Over and over again in the book of Matthew we find this happening and I want to tell you: in this part of the

book, it's easy to accept. There's very little that will ruffle your theological feathers by accepting it in this part of the book. We will probably get to some uncomfortable portions of Scripture that deal with **this generation**. But I want you to see this phrase used over and over again.

*Matthew 11:16 But whereunto shall I liken **this generation**? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows.*

Jesus is constantly saying things about that generation.

*Matthew 12:41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with **this generation**.*

That generation is the only generation that looked at the Son of God and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." I have some feeling that the Holocaust was an answer to prayer of the Jews of the first generation. "His blood be on us and on our children." I am so frustrated, so frustrated with people that mean well saying stupid things like, "God never blamed the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus." That sounds really good, except the New Testament disagrees with it in every way.

In Acts 2 Peter said, "You men of Judea." He goes and preaches to them for 15 or 20 verses and says, "God has made this Jesus, who you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, where Paul lays the guilt of the crucifixion at the Jews' feet.