

THE SIGN OF JONAH

There is little doubt that most Old Testament believers had very little understanding of the mysterious ramifications involved in their hope of resurrection. Although many believed in the resurrection from the dead, most believed that resurrection was to a life much like what they knew and to a world much like they knew. There appears to be no real depth to their understanding of “the regeneration,” glorification, and what the new Heaven/Earth would be like.

“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 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” (Matthew 12:38-41; compare Luke 11:14-32).

The context of Christ’s statement regarding the “sign of the prophet Jonas” is about the hardness of the “scribes and of the Pharisees” to Jesus being the Messiah. They refused to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. In this hardness of heart, they sought to prove that He was guilty of blaspheme. This is the purpose of their questioning. Christ uses two historical and miraculous examples of repentance to rebuke them for their hardness of heart. He uses the prophet Jonah, who hardened himself against God’s command in his self-righteousness against the wicked people of Nineveh to which God had directed him to preach. The “sign of the prophet Jonas” was a whale’s swallowing of Jonah because of his hardness of heart, Jonah dying in that whale’s belly, his being resurrected from the dead, and being vomited out so as to obey God and preach God’s call of repentance to the Ninevites.

People for centuries have argued that Jonah could not have survived for three days in the belly of a whale. First, understand that if God wanted Jonah to survive in the belly of a whale for three days or three years, God could do that without a doubt. Secondly, according to Christ’s comparison of his death, burial, and resurrection to Jonah’s event in the whale’s belly, Jonah died in there. Jonah was resurrected from the dead to preach repentance to the hard hearted Ninevites. It was Jonah’s miraculous resurrection from the dead that was the precedent for the miraculous repentance of the Gentile Ninevites. Christ is saying that the ultimate hardness of heart to the miraculous working of God in the salvation of a soul is the refusal to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ’s statement in Matthew 12:38-41 is preceded by a remarkable warning to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 12:31-32. Jesus had just cast a demon out of a young man who was dumb because of his demon possession. He warns the scribes and Pharisees against ascribing the power behind the miracle to the prince of demons, Beelzebub. In doing so, they were blaspheming the Holy Spirit’s ministry through the Lord Jesus Christ.

³¹ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.
³² And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

Jesus is leading the scribes and Pharisees to a future time in their thinking that He foreknows. Jesus knows He will be falsely accused by the very scribes and Pharisees to which He is speaking. Jesus knows He will be tried and false evidence will be presented against Him. Jesus knows He will be found guilty, condemned, and will be crucified. Jesus also knows that He will rise again victorious over death with the power to bring salvation to “whosoever will.” It is critical to understand that all of these future events are in the mind of Jesus as He speaks to the scribes and Pharisees. This is the substance of understanding His warning regarding the “sign of the prophet Jonas.” Once Jesus completed His offering of Himself to God for the “sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2), the unbelieving and hard hearted Jews that cried for the crucifixion of Jesus would be confronted with the reality of the testimony of His resurrection from the dead. Believing in the resurrection of Jesus would become a critical aspect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and necessary to a salvation decision of faith.

¹ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; ⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (I Corinthians 15:1-8).

Therefore, the warning of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees regarding the “sign of the prophet Jonas” is about refusing to repent of their sin and “dead works” after hearing of the resurrection of Jesus. Just as the scribes and Pharisees had ascribed the miracle of Jesus casting out the demon of the dumb boy to Beelzebub was blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, so is the denial the resurrection of Jesus. To hear the Gospel, understand the message of the Gospel, and refuse to believe the Gospel is the ultimate act of sin against the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That person has come to a spiritual point of no return in his life. He must either believe and be received of God as a “born again” child of God (John 1:11-12), or he will reject Christ and be forever rejected of God. Once the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment with an understanding of condemnation and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that sinner’s rejection of Christ seals him in his lost destiny and causes God to give him “over to a reprobate mind” (Romans 1:28).

Understanding the resurrection of Jesus Christ is critical to understanding the Gospel. In fact, no one can be saved apart from understanding the resurrection as a critical aspect of Christ's finished work of redemption. The resurrection of Jesus goes hand-in-hand with His glorification. Jesus was not resurrected in a mere physical body. Jesus was resurrected in a glorified physical body. Therefore, Jesus had two miraculous births. Jesus was miraculously born in a human body through His mother Mary. Jesus was "born again" into the New Creation in His resurrection and glorification. This is a fact that many Christians *choke on* because they do not differentiate between salvation and regeneration. Jesus Christ did not need to be saved because He never sin and did not possess a sin nature. However, it is a critical aspect of our redemption that He was glorified, which is another word for being regenerated or "born again." Regeneration is the transfiguration of a physical body into a spiritual and glorified body. There is considerable Scriptural testimony to Jesus' regeneration.

¹ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, ² Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; ³ Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; ⁴ Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. ⁵ For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? ⁶ And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. ⁷ And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire" (Hebrews 1:1-7).

The writer of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5, "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee." In Acts 13:27-37, Paul clearly teaches that Psalm 2:7 was speaking, not of the incarnation of the Messiah in His physical conception and birth, but of His resurrection.

²⁷ For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*. ²⁸ And though they found no cause of death *in him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. ²⁹ And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead: ³¹ And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. ³² And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, ³³ God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. ³⁴ And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the

sure mercies of David. ³⁵ **Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.** ³⁶ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: ³⁷ **But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption”** Acts 13:27-37).

Why is it critical that we understand that Psalm 2:7 is referring to the resurrection of Jesus rather than to His incarnation? It is critical that we understand that Psalm 2:7 is referring to the resurrection of Jesus rather than to His incarnation because the resurrection of Jesus is the doorway into the New Creation or “the regeneration.” Jesus’s resurrection became the surety of our resurrection/glorification and our entrance into the New Creation.

“²³ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵ When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶ But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. ²⁷ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, **That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration** when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. ³⁰ But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first” (Matthew 19:23-30).

We must question why the translators placed the comma after “follow me,” rather than after “the regeneration.” There is no punctuation in the Greek text. The common argument for the comma after “follow me” rather than after “the regeneration” is that Jesus did not need to be “born again.” It is true that Jesus did not need to be saved or redeemed. However, salvation and regeneration are not the same things. Jesus, as the “last Adam,” and the “firstborn” of the New Creation not only needed to be regenerated, He was regenerated. The regeneration of Jesus refers to His humanity, not to His deity. Regeneration refers to His glorification following His resurrection. The regeneration of Jesus is critical to the restoration of dominion of the first creation lost in Adam’s willful disobedience. The regeneration of Jesus is referred to in Scripture when Jesus is called the “firstborn” of the New Creation.

“¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son {*this “kingdom” is “the regeneration”*}: ¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the

forgiveness of sins: ¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, **the firstborn of every creature**: ¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:12-18).

Colossians 1:18 is critical to our understanding of Jesus’ regeneration and the hundreds of Old Testament types that point to this spiritual paradigm. Every Old Testament patriarch was given the primogeniture (“preeminence”) of his family. Every new generation was a new beginning. This genealogical emphasis in Scripture exists merely to lead the believer to the ultimate “firstborn” and His ultimate “preeminence” (Galatians 3:16). However, notice that the emphasis in Colossians 1:18 is not upon the birth of Jesus, but upon His resurrection “from the dead.” This is also the emphasis of Romans 8:29-30 in what can be referred to as the *Ordo Regenerare* (Latin for the *order of regeneration*). The context of Romans chapter eight is not the believer’s initial salvation of the soul, but his final salvation in his glorification or the “redemption of the body” (Romans 8:23).

“²⁹ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he {*Jesus*} **might be the firstborn among many brethren**. ³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate {*to be glorified*}, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified {*the impartation of the righteousness of Christ in the indwelling Holy Spirit, II Peter 1:4*}: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30).

“¹ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. ² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ³ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3:1-3).

Clearly the warning of Jesus regarding the “sign of the prophet Jonas” in Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:14-32 is a call to repentance. Jesus was warning the scribes and Pharisees about misplaced faith in religion rather than faith in the Person and redemption work of Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection/glorification was the “door” into the spiritual Kingdom of “the regeneration.” The Jews could not see beyond the physical kingdom on earth. They could not see beyond their own self-deception of false beliefs that saw entrance into the physical kingdom through keeping the Mosaic Covenant. Although there will be a physical, earthly kingdom on earth for one-thousand years, that kingdom is merely a stepping stone to the ultimate eternal and heavenly Kingdom of Christ in “the regeneration” – the New Heaven/Earth. All those “born again” of the Spirit of God are “the regeneration” and “the sheepfold” of Christ.

“¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ² But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. ⁴ And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. ⁵ And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. ⁶ This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. ⁷ Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:1-11).