

about the nature of one's heart.

15. Had the Pharisees and theologians committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? What evidence indicates this?
16. Had Jesus' friends committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit by referring to His unflagging zeal to keep on helping people at the expense of His own rest and comfort as "madness"?
17. Who were these well-meaning "friends and/or relatives" who tried to save Jesus from Himself by seizing Him to take Him away from it all? How do you know? What relation does your answer have to the fact that shortly after this event Jesus' mother and brothers interrupt Jesus' preaching by asking Him to step outside to talk with them?
18. Can a man speak righteously and have a wicked heart? Can a man speak wickedly and have a good heart? State Jesus' general rule and then show how the seeming exceptions to the rule are not exceptions at all, but examples of something else of which Jesus warned us, which, in turn, proves this general rule true also.
19. What kind of a word is an "idle word"?
20. What is the meaning of the expression (in Mark's parallel) "He hath Beelzebub"?
21. Was the remark, that Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons, itself blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Explain.
22. Is the sin against the Holy Spirit something people can and do commit today? If so, how? If not, why not?

Section 29

JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH

(Possible Parallel: Lk. 11:16, 24, 26, 29-32)

TEXT: 12:38-45

38. Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, 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 Jonah the prophet:
40. for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
41. The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah 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 ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.
43. But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not.
44. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.
45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this generation.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss repentance. What is it? How is it important? What statements by Jesus show that a negative repentance, or the mere putting an evil thing out of one's life, is insufficient?
- b. How should we understand and apply what Jesus said about a demon returning to the man from which it had departed?
- c. John said that a record of the miracles was given that men might believe (John 20:30, 31), and Jesus clearly stated that miracles were basic to faith. Here, however, Jesus rebuked the desire for signs and said that it proceeded from a wicked heart. How do you harmonize these statements?
- d. Do you think that something more than evidence is needed to produce conviction in a man, that is strong enough to cause him to change his life? What is the relationship between a man's will and the evidence presented to his mind?
- e. Why do you suppose it was so sinful for these theologians to ask for special supernatural proof of Jesus' authority? What kind of sign would have satisfied them? Why were they seeking a sign? Were not they the rightful religious authority that, as defenders of public morality and religion, not only had the right but also the obligation to demand the credentials of all religious teachers including Jesus?
- f. What do you see as the difference, if indeed there is a difference, between the requesting of a sign from heaven on the part of these Pharisees on the one hand and the requesting of signs from heaven on the part of someone like Gideon, on the other? (Judges 6:36-40)
- g. What is so special about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

that causes Jesus to say that it is the one sign He will give, that would convince the Jews of His divine identity and authority? What about the other miracles that He had done that accomplished the same purpose for other people before the resurrection ever took place? (Jn. 14:11) Was there something inferior or deficient in those other miracles?

- h. How do you account for the fact that Jesus in this text declares that He will give no other sign to that generation than that of His resurrection, while, as a matter of fact, He is recorded as having done many other miracles long after this statement, yet they were done before He died and rose again. How do you account for this fact?
- i. Is not God to be the Judge at the great judgment? How then can the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South stand up at the judgment to condemn the people of Jesus' generation?
- j. Jesus gives a precise statement that no one can mistake: "So shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Yet, none of the Gospel writers, Apostles and enemies of Jesus ever record this prophecy or sign as being actually fulfilled. All who ever speak of Jesus' predictions or of the fulfillment, describe Jesus as having arisen "on the third day," or "after three days," or something similar. How then do you harmonize this precise language in the prophecy or sign with the loose language of the supposed fulfillment? Is it possible that Jesus made a mistake? Is it possible that the Apostles misunderstood His meaning here? Should we reinterpret all the Last Week passages that concern the facts of the burial and resurrection period as so to fit the "three days and three nights" prediction even if this makes the Apostles contradict the Lord?
- k. Some scholars are for various reasons not convinced that the book of Jonah is a book of sober history. They describe it as "poetic fiction, an allegory, a parable, a prose poem, a didactic story, a midrash, a symbolic book, a legend containing a kernel of fact." On the basis of Jesus' use of the experience of Jonah here in this context, do you think it possible to discern whether it is any of the foregoing, or else a narrative of historical fact? If not, why not? If so, upon what basis?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then some of the theologians and Pharisees demanded, "Teacher, we wish to see supernatural proof from God that establishes your authority to teach."

But Jesus refused, "Only evil and faithless people ask for more proof of my identity as if all the proof I have just given were not enough. I will not provide further proof to satisfy your idle curiosity, except the portent involved in the miraculous history of Jonah the prophet. That demonstration is this: In the same way that Jonah spent the better part of three days in the great fish and so became a sign from God to the inhabitants of Nineveh, so will I, the Son of man, spend the better part of three days and nights buried in the earth. By this means will my experience become a supernatural proof to the people of this present age that God is actually speaking through me.

"The inhabitants of Nineveh will stand up on judgment day along with the people of these times and the Ninevites, as mute witnesses, will condemn you. This is true because they felt their need to turn to God and did so with reference to the message preached by Jonah. But you have heard something here greater than Jonah!

"Similarly, at the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up as mute testimony against the unbelievers of this generation and condemn you. You see, she felt the longing for greater wisdom than she possessed and came halfway around the world just to listen to **Solomon's wisdom**. Listen: there is something involved here greater than Solomon!

"This evil, unbelieving generation is like a man out of whom a demon has departed. The demon goes through dry country looking for a place to rest, but he never finds it. Then the demon says to himself, 'I will return to my home I just left.' So the demon returns and finds the man empty, cleaned up a bit, tidy—but **EMPTY**. Then the demon goes and rounds up seven other demons that, for wickedness, make him look like a beginner! This gang of demons comes and moves in to live there. So in the end, the plight of that man is much worse than at the beginning. And that is just what is going to happen to this generation of evil people!

SUMMARY

Jesus warned the skeptic religionists of His day that a religion that only makes a man empty and unable even to discern the obvious evidences of God's working in his own generation, is false, regardless of all else that might be said for it. It is incapable of filling life. There have been people in history that, with less evidence than the theologians were demanding of Jesus, turned to God and expended great effort to learn even a portion of God's wisdom and truth from God's people. But there is far more evidence now for this generation

than those underprivileged people of Jonah's or Solomon's generations ever possessed. This generation will be condemned by those far less-privileged people who did better with their far inferior opportunities to know the truth.

NOTES

A. UNREASONABLE REQUEST (12:38)

12:38 **Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we would see a sign from thee.** Then (*Tôte*) suggests an immediate temporal connection between the preceding incident and this demand that Jesus present His credentials. Whether it occurred immediately upon the conclusion of the Lord's forensic victory over the Pharisees or, as Luke suggests (11:16), was part of their original attack, is not so important as the spirit which this question manifests and the additional illustration it provides us of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. **Certain of the scribes and Pharisees**, though not the same persons as those who accused Jesus of secret alliance with Satan. (Note Luke's *héteroï*, 11:16, if parallel.)

Teacher, we would see a sign from thee. Their right to requested this is undoubted and is the proper safeguard against imposture. (Cf. Dt. 18:15-22; 13:1-5) Because of these Mosaic regulations granted to the Jews on the importance and nature of supernatural credentials, they were so ahead of the rest of the world that Paul could safely generalize, describing his people: "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom." (1 Co. 1:22) But in this group of rabbis now surrounding Jesus, were there any who were beginning to feel that Jesus had brought them face to face with real, divine authority, or that He might possibly be, after all, the Messiah with all the concomitant majesty and authority? Were there any who, feeling themselves so deeply but strangely swayed by His unparalleled ministry, now sensed their need either to acknowledge Him once and for all or to repudiate His claims and destroy Him? Were there any who felt that some compelling miracle would really overcome what they had come to believe were objections honestly arrived at? While a mentality of honest and proper doubt is at the base of this demand for signs in general, lest those who are to be influenced by the message vouchsafed by them be deceived by presumptuous revelations falsely attributed to God (cf. Jn. 2:18 and the attitude of the Jerusalem committee toward John the Baptist, Jn. 1:19-28), more often than not this sign-seeking attitude was, as A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's*

Greek Testament, in loc.) termed it: "impudent, insulting and hypocritical." Whereas their tone is formally respectful, it is motivated by infinite cunning, because it was really an appeal to the multitudes by a display of authority, and, at the same time, a ploy to maintain their own prestige, a stratagem they often employed when no other reasonable objection presented itself. (Cf. Mt. 15:39b—16:4; 27:42 and par.; Mk. 8:11, 12; Lk. 11:16, 29, 30; 23:8; Jn. 6:30) Their purpose here, as elsewhere, is clearly to trap Him by means which He either cannot or will not escape. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:35; [Jn. 8:6]) Though their action is described as *πειράζοντες*, which can be interpreted as that neutrally oriented testing of a thing to see of what it is made, or the testing of a person to see how he reacts, nevertheless Jesus reads their motives written on their hearts and declares them as **evil and adulterous**. So their nicely-worded challenge is neither objective nor sincere. Their imposture is unmasked when they who sit on the jury of inquest, because of personal prejudices and moral failure, refuse to admit the evidence of signs already given. By rejecting the obvious proof of other evidence, they disqualify themselves and automatically surrender their right to demand signs, for, by their tacit admission, they cannot arrive at a satisfactory conclusion verified by and based upon all foregoing evidence. Their hypocrisy is discovered when these self-appointed, but disqualified, judges resolutely maintain their effrontery in making such a demand.

From thee: They demanded not only that the sign be done by Jesus but that it be **from heaven**. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Mt. 16:1; Lk. 11:16) What were they expecting? (Cf. Jn. 6:31; 1 Sam. 12:18; 1 Kg. 18)

1. Is Lenski (*Matthew*, 490) correct in putting the emphasis upon "a sign to see" (*σημεῖον ἰδεῖν*), as if they demanded something that required no faith, but just sight in order to be converted to Him as the divine Messiah? Do we see here an unhealthy craving for an astronomical circus performance in which the sun, moon and stars perform antics, in which unworldly visions appear against the heavenly backdrop or in which angelic armies suddenly become visible as they pass in review in the presence of God?

But what is wrong with drawing back the curtain to the spiritual world, permitting mortals to see the universe full of music, color, light and beauty—worlds crammed to overflowing with evidences of God's presence and care? After

all, is this not the promised fulfilment after which our Christian longing yearns? Could there be any spiritual harm in demonstrating once and for all that Jesus alone can, by the single force of the spoken word, perform greater feats than those of which even the wildest imagination of writers of science fiction or of the tellers of ancient myths could dream? Are the commentaries correct in saying that such prodigies would meet no spiritual need, would point to no salvation from sin and would share nothing in common with saving faith? Is it true that such portents would only satisfy temporarily that morbid part of our being, because when fed would only cry for more, and when no more is forthcoming, reverts to the old dissatisfactions, doubts and denials? (So, Lenski, *ad loc.*) After reading C. S. Lewis' Christian mythology (*The Tales of Narnia*) and his trilogy of science fiction (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Voyage to Venus* and *That Hideous Strength*), one can no longer be so sure that such visions must necessarily produce such bad fruits. Lewis makes a good case for living out one's life on earth in genuine conformity to God's will even after having personally walked and lived among angels and stars. Further, however imperfectly Lewis may have imagined the reality, such experiences left the earthling more than satisfied with their reality both while they were being experienced and longing for them when he left them to return to the present experiences of earth life. But the longing for the breaking in upon earth's reality by the celestial life, as Lewis imagined it, was perfectly consonant with the longing for the presence of God. But even among Lewis' characters we find people who were not gently drawn to these same happy conclusions. Rather, just because of their character, they are repelled by everything that attracts and satisfies those who choose to be servants of God. This, of course, just proves the validity of the evidence which they rejected and consequently the justice of their condemnation. Lewis proves thus that it is possible to imagine a personal, first-hand experience of celestial phenomena without one's freedom being violated.

And that such a vision could actually minister to men's spiritual needs is demonstrated by the supposition that Jesus could have opened their eyes to fantastic spiritual realities, even as God did for His lesser servant, Elisha, when he

prayed that He grant this vision to his servant. (2 Kg. 6:14-17) He could have drawn back the curtain for an apocalyptic portrayal of the past, present and future vicissitudes of God's people and their final victory in Christ. And this kind of demonstration, such as we actually find filmed in the book of Revelation, could have been made so as to produce in the witnesses that kind of satisfaction with the reality of Jesus' authority that to deny what they would have experienced would be a denial of themselves. This does not mean that they would have automatically submitted themselves to His will or entered His discipleship, for sheer display of heavenly power or visions can produce quite the opposite effect. (Cf. Mt. 8:34 Notes; Ex. 20:18-22) Naked supernaturalism does not impel belief. Therefore, Jesus could have performed this sign without damaging their will, so that they would somehow have been forced to believe against their wishes. So why did He not do it? See on 12:39, 40.

2. **From Heaven:** Is this a Hebraistic circumlocution for "from God"? Or was this demand due to a popular suspicion that miracles done on earth could be rigged, whereas signs **from heaven**, taking place in a sphere where no human hand could possibly manipulate, would not be deceptive, spurious or counterfeited, hence, more genuine, more convincing? Under the influence of the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the inter-testamental period, they may have actually been demanding the literal manifestation of the messianic, royal display pictured in those popularizations of Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah's appearance. Also, since some of their own disciples or even rabbis themselves were known to have performed exorcisms (as those to which Jesus Himself alludes for sake of argument, 12:27), or since some of their rabbis claimed to have healed by their great (supposed) piety or prayers, let Him provide some astounding, decisive and indubitable proof of His authority. (See Edersheim *Life*, II, 68, 69)

B. LOGICAL REFUSAL (12:39)

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 . . .** The very character of the questors themselves is Jesus' reason for refusing to give what they ask, not that He could not, in the nature of signs, provide the most

extraordinary miracle to demonstrate His identity and bedazzle them with His glory and power. But in what sense are they so culpable? (Cf. other similar characterizations of people who stand in the presence of substantial proof but act the part of unbelievers: Mk. 8:38; Mt. 17:17; Ac. 2:40; Phil. 2:15) Are they more specifically wicked than perverts, kidnappers or any other sinners in the catalogues? Their request provoked a groan in Jesus (Mk. 8:12), because here are the elders of His nation, the standard product and best examples of that religion they professed to be from God in exactly the traditionalized form currently taught, whom He must condemn, placing them on a par with brutish, irreligious men. And He **MUST** do this, because their religiousness has made them into persons who can fly in the face of all foregoing evidence that should have been sufficient to convince them and still demand signs, as if nothing worthy of the name had ever been done!

1. They are **adulterous**. **Adulterous**, in this peculiarly Jewish context, describes that spiritual infidelity according to which Israel, formally united to God by a covenant as binding and as intimate as marriage, spurned her divine Husband by idolatry, hypocrisy and indifference toward God. (Study Jer. 2:2; 3:1-22; Hos. 1:2—2:20; 4:10; 7:4; Ezek. 16 and 23) What were the percentages for believing that these spiritual descendents of patriarchs, who could commit fornication in the name of religion in full view of the burning, holy mountain where God had just given the most fantastic display of His own holiness and presence, would somehow respond any better, or be more significantly affected by a marvellous display of supernatural fireworks? It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those He deems already sufficient!
2. They are **evil**:
 - a. Because their motive for asking for a sign is not that they might have good reasons for believing Him and submitting to His Lordship, but that they might be even more confirmed in their despising His revolutionary doctrine. They were not asking for evidence for faith, but for more material to criticize.
 - b. Because they desired to be vindicated in that rejection in the mind of the multitude. Their eye was not set on seeing truth, but on seeing their prestige and influence reestablished with the people.

- c. Because these unfaithful Jews are rejecting those portents by which God had already signalled the identity and consequent authority of the Messiah. In their perversity they 'prescribe' what course of action God Himself has to follow to suit their whims. Because they turned their back upon the multitudinous evidences that God had already given, it became morally impossible to concede them what they require. Dictating to God is evil!
- d. Because it is sin to reject evidence. (Dt. 18:18, 19; cf. Lk. 16:30, 31) These scribes were being disloyal to their own law and blatantly blind to all the prophetic precedents in their long history of God's dealings with Israel through men who brought just such evidences as Jesus now presented.

So it would not have mattered what manner of evidence the Lord COULD have presented them, their character rendered any objective examination of it impossible. The word **generation** refers specifically to **this evil generation** of Jews then confronting Jesus (v. 45; Mk. 8:12; Lk. 11:29), but the denunciation is also applicable to ANY group in any era that refuses the testimony of evidence that contradicts their pet theories and by which refusal they hope to defend their skepticism. In order better to appreciate what is involved here in the nature of supernatural evidence, contrast Jesus' answer given to the Pharisees with that sent to John the Baptist. (11:11ff.) The Pharisees could not be treated in the same manner as was John, since they rejected the evidential power of Jesus' miracles as credentials by ascribing them to the power of Satan, whereas John accepted the witness of Jesus' works as the mighty acts of God. So, in his case the Lord could refer him to them.

And there shall no sign be given to it . . . McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 1f) argues that:

In demanding of Jesus a sign, the scribes and Pharisees denied by implication that any of the multitude of signs which he had wrought were real signs; and their demand was for one of a different kind. In answering that no sign should be given but that of the prophet, he could not have meant that he would give no more of the kind which he had been giving; for he did give more of these, and in great abundance; but he meant that none should be given of a different kind, except the sign of Jonah. This was different, in that it

was wrought *upon* him, and not *by* him, and it was therefore a more direct and manifest exhibition of power from heaven.

C. MERCIFUL EXCEPTION (12:39c; 40)

12:39c and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. Here is written the wisdom and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ: in the presence of His fiercest opponents, who themselves deserve nothing but an eternity of tortured conscience, He graciously grants them precisely what they ask, a sign of a different type. For even this merciful exception to His own strict rule ("No sign shall be given.") is in itself a demand that these critics suspend judgment until the fulfilment of the sign given. Study Dt. 18:15-22). From a Jewish standpoint, therefore, they got everything they asked for, even though it was not precisely what they would have dictated, had that opportunity been offered them. Our Lord can make even the most insidious, dishonest, unfair demand to boomerang upon those who make it, and, at the same time, provide Himself with further evidence of His true identity. So the resurrection is to be the one great sign which might yet convince them, since all signs and miracles previous to the resurrection are given power and significance by it. No one miracle stands alone, but receives its meaning from the resurrection, because a permanently dead miracle-worker is of less abiding significance than a living, resurrected Lord. Thus it was that Jesus was to be "designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead . . ." (Ro. 1:4; cf. Jn. 2:18-22) This act of God in raising Jesus from death was His authentic stamp of approval not only upon the words and acts of Jesus (Cf. Ac. 2:22-33), but also God's guarantee that it is with THIS Man, and no other, that all men must have to do. (Ac. 17:31)

The sign of Jonah the prophet, as a phrase, suggests that it would have been a sign well known to the original hearers, especially to anyone acquainted with the history of that prophet. However, in what did this particular sign consist? Did Jesus intend to apply only certain features in the episode of Jonah's life, i.e. only the incident of the sea monster and not the preaching of repentance to the pagan metropolis? These questions are answered by Jesus' next statement, which, while there is absolutely no textual evidence against it, has been the basis of many ingenious, but unsuccessful, attempts to expunge it from the original words of Christ. (See Plummer, *Matthew*, 183; McGarvey, *Jesus and Jonah*, chap. I; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383) The sign of Jonah must be interpreted in light of Jesus' own

application of it in this context, and not by some other use He is thought to have made elsewhere of this incident in the life of Jonah. (Cf. Lk. 11:30 and Plummer's comments thereon as well as on Mt. 12:40. The agnostic commentaries tend to place the emphasis on the preaching of Jonah and deny as preposterous the miraculous elements in Jonah's experience.)

12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Despite the no little temptation to see in Jonah's mission to Nineveh a symbolical and typical importance (with Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383ff.), these words are Jesus' explanation of what HE means by **the sign of Jonah**. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 9ff.) argues that:

His own resurrection, after entombment for three days, is called the sign of Jonah, because of the similarity of the two miracles. This view is confirmed by the consideration that it was undoubtedly a miraculous sign which the scribes and Pharisees demanded; and the word sign in his answer must be understood in the same sense. . . . But how could Jonah have been a miraculous sign to the Ninevites? He wrought no miracle among them; and his preaching could not have been regarded by them as miraculous until, by means of some separate miraculous sign they were convinced that it was a miraculous prediction. That which made him a sign to the Ninevites must then have been his experience in the fish, connected as it was with the command twice given to go and cry against Nineveh. But did the Ninevites hear of the sign of Jonah before they repented at his preaching? These men and many others answer, no; and they so answer because the fact is not stated in the Book of Jonah. But while it is not stated in that book, it is stated by Jesus, and there is nothing in the book which conflicts with the statement. On the contrary, the book leaves the way open for the supposition that the news of the miracle reached Nineveh as soon as Jonah did, if not sooner. . . . Necessarily, then, if there was a real analogy, and not a sophistical assertion of one, the sign in the person of Jonah must have been communicated to the Ninevites, and it must, as in the other case (i.e. of Jesus' resurrection, HEF) have been the controlling evidence on which their faith and their consequent repentance rested . . . the sign of Jonah was the miracle wrought on

his person, and . . . this was certainly known to the Ninevites before they repented at his preaching. . . .

And it is to be noticed that, in drawing an analogy between His future resurrection and the experience of the prophet, the Lord asserts that **Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale** (sic: ASV; better: **sea monster**, so ASV footnote and Arndt-Gingrich on *kétos*, since **whale** may be too specific a word to describe this specially prepared fish.) Attacks on the force of Jesus' affirmation of the historicity of the facts surrounding Jonah have been suggested along the lines mentioned by Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

Our Lord's mention of Jonah as preaching to the Ninevites does not require us to believe that the story of Jonah is history. In His own parables He made use of fiction for instruction. Why should He not use an O.T. parable for the same purpose? If He were on earth now, would He not quote Dante?

McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*) has so thoroughly dealt with these and other similar attacks, that one could do no better than to summarize his answers to the objections and simply acknowledge our indebtedness. Page numbers in each case refer to *Jesus and Jonah*.

1. Objection: "Writers and speakers of every age and people speak of fictional characters and their experiences as if they were real, without, at the same time, assuming any objective reality for the existence or activities of those characters. Or, in relation to written works, they may refer to them without concerning themselves about their historicity, literary form, authorship or date of composition."
 - a. McGarvey (19): "If the hearers of Jesus had so understood the story of Jonah, the cases would be parallel; but it is notorious, and it is freely admitted that they understood the story to be true, and when, therefore, Jesus spoke of it as a true story, he deceived them if it was not."
 - b. In other words, such allusions to fictional characters and experiences are permissible only where writer and readers or speaker and audience know where each other stands on the question of the objective non-existence of those characters. One can cite even Walt Disney's cartoon characters as illustrations without being thought a fool, so long as his audience is aware of where he stands on

the question of their ultimate, objective reality. But where he gives the impression that he holds their view of the matter when he really disagrees, then he conveys a false impression.

2. Objection: "The reference to Jonah is an illustration and, as such, serves only to suggest a thought which does not rest, for its effectiveness as a means of conveying the thought, upon the full historical validity of the thing which serves as the basis for the illustration."
 - a. McGarvey (20): "The question is not whether an illustration drawn from a supposed fact would be invalidated by the discovery that the account of the fact is allegorical; but whether the particular use Jesus made of the story of Jonah implies that Jonah was in the fish . . . for if Jesus treated the story as historical in speaking to men who held it to be so, then He was either mistaken about it himself, or he deceived his hearers. There is no possible escape from this alternative."
 - b. But granted that this is an illustration, what is thereby proved against the historicity of the story upon which the illustration is based? Again, McGarvey (21): "The undoubted reality of the past fact is what gives force to the assertion respecting the future one. . . . If the Pharisees could have answered Jesus, as these critics now do, by saying, Very well, Master; Jonah was not in the bowels of the fish; they could have added: therefore, according to your own showing, you will not be in the heart of the earth. Instead of being an illustration of something . . . the remark was a solemn prediction of a fact yet to be, which should be analogous to one that certainly had been."
3. Objection: "The book of Jonah was a well-known didactic parable written expressly to communicate a great moral lesson. Hence, Jesus' hearers would have understood His reference to that parable of Jonah and, consequently, He would not have given them a false impression."
 - a. Who can prove, however, that the Jews of Jesus' day understood the book of Jonah to be anything less than sober history?
 - b. But for any sort of moral lesson to be taught, the audience must understand the reference made by the speaker. While it is possible and admissible to use fictitious characters or make reference to imaginary facts as if they were real,

if Jesus were doing this, then, His hearers did not understand His allusion, since they thought Jonah to be history. If Jesus believed Jonah to be fiction, then He made a false impression, because He talked as if it were fact. (McGarvey, 23)

- c. So what is left is a Jesus that cannot be acquitted of the charge of intentional duplicity if He knew that the event was not real and yet used it to confirm their impression that it was. (McGarvey, 24)

Nor is there any hope of admitting a portion of the book of Jonah as containing a kernel of truth, while rejecting the rest as unhistorical, unreliable accretions of a later age. Some would teach that Jesus' notice concerning Jonah may be trusted only to justify credence in that kernel of fact upon which the traditional exterior ultimately rests. But the "traditional exterior" which is passed over as "unhistorical, unreliable accretions", that is, referred to in this manner by the critics, is precisely those elements that are miraculous. McGarvey (32) is right to notice that:

If the words of Jesus . . . prove that the narrative of Jonah rests "ultimately upon a basis of fact"; that the outlines of the narrative are historical, and that the Ninevites did actually repent, why does not his explicit declaration that "Jonah was three days and three nights in the bowels of the sea monster" prove that this also is historical? I am afraid, after all, that the ultimate reason for denying the credibility of the narrative is that which is the avowed reason of unbelievers—an unwillingness to accept the miraculous in the story—and this is the very essence of skepticism.

Others, in the endeavor to relieve themselves from the dilemma of seeing Jesus committed to a position unfavorable to the skeptical critics, follow the expedient of pontificating that Jesus did not actually say this, the statement itself coming from some lesser voice. Compare Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

There is no doubt that ver. 40 is part of the original text of this Gospel; it is absent from no MS. no version. But there is good reason for believing that it was no part of Christ's reply on this occasion. 1. It is not in Lk. 11:29-32. 2. It does not fit the context, which speaks of preaching producing repentance and is in no way concerned with the Resurrection. 3. It would not be intelligible to Christ's

hearers, who knew nothing of His future Resurrection. 4. The parallel drawn between Jonah and Christ is not true. . . . But the facts will not justify the statement that Christ's body was "three days and *three nights*" in the grave. . . . The verse may be a gloss which got into the authority which Mt. used; or it may be an insertion made by Mt. himself on the supposition that Christ's mention of Jonah referred to him as a type of the Resurrection. . . .

But to deal with these arguments in detail it is necessary to observe that:

1. While admitting for sake of argument that these two passages are parallel, the fact that this statement (Mt. 12:40) is not in Luke 11:29-32 is no argument against its being reported by the eyewitness Matthew as over against Luke who was not present. And were even both men present to hear Jesus' original reply, it does not follow that both would agree on a verbatim citation, as even a superficial examination of thousands of parallel synoptic Gospel texts reveals. However, it is debatable whether they be even parallel reports of the same event.
2. The context speaks not merely of preaching producing repentance, but specifically of this captious demand for a sign, hurled at Jesus. This, and nothing else, is what called forth this answer of Jesus. Contrary to that skeptical mentality that refuses to admit the objective reality of any supernatural events, the Jewish mentality requires that a sign consist in some prediction which can not be manipulated by the one giving it, nor which can be foreseen or presupposed by normal human sagacity or foresight, i.e. that it be specifically supernatural in character. So the sign does not lie in some supposed contrast between the preaching of Jonah which produced the repentance of the Ninevites on the one hand, and the preaching of Jesus Christ which resulted in the impenitence of the unbelieving Jews, on the other. This, because the impenitence of the Jewish nation as a whole was already a foregone conclusion. If not, the standard procedure through Jewish history was the brutal rejection and murder of the living prophets and the hypocritical glorification of the dead ones. (Cf. Mt. 23:29, 30) So, from a practical standpoint, there could be no sign, nothing supernatural, in predicting their refusal to repent. To think so is to ignore all that the

- Jews really intended to convey by their demand for a sign.
3. To speak of Jesus' future resurrection so those hearers would perhaps be unintelligible, but so what? Perhaps they would be unable to foresee the mechanics of that event, but what does their inability prove about the right or propriety of revealing otherwise unknowable truth? That is what revelations are for! Did Nicodemus instantly comprehend the new birth when Jesus tried to capitalize on that rabbi's confession that "You are a Teacher come from God"? Rather than let Jesus teach him as One possessed of the requisite authority to reveal otherwise unknowable truth, Nicodemus began to argue against what he could not immediately comprehend, since, to him, the mechanics of the rebirth were quite unclear. No, the objection here is based upon the prejudice that God cannot reveal to man what he does not already know or what does not immediately appeal to his intelligence as right and proper. Even the Apostles themselves, before the resurrection actually occurred, stumbled at the clearest, unfigurative explanations of this event, but that did not hinder Jesus from continuing His patient efforts to reveal it to them. (Cf. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19)
 4. The objection, that sees the parallel between the experience of Jesus and Jonah as fundamentally false, since in no sense can it be said that the body of Jesus lay in the tomb a full "three days and three nights," is based upon the mistaken notion that this phrase is literal and, hence, to be considered the most precise expression of the schedule of events governing the Last Week of Jesus' life. But that this phrase is not in any sense literal nor intended strictly to govern the time schedule for the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord is proved by the following considerations:
 - a. If we must understand Jesus literally here, we must also expect Him to prophesy His own resurrection elsewhere as taking place "on the FOURTH day," if He is to remain in the tomb literally three days and three nights, no more and no less. But this He never says. It is always "on the third day" or "after three days," which are two exactly parallel statements of a Hebrew idiom, as a careful analysis of the various Synoptic texts will verify. (Cf. Mt. 16:21 and Lk. 9:22 with Mt. 8:31; Mt. 17:23 with Mk. 9:31; Mt. 20:19 and Lk. 18:33 with Mk.

10:34; also Lk. 24:7, 46 and Jn. 2:13) Surely Jesus Himself understood His own language when He explained elsewhere to His disciples what He meant here when put under pressure by the scribes to furnish them a sign. Therefore, unless we are to accuse the Lord of self-contradiction, we must permit Him the usual liberties to use language as men normally use it and we must look elsewhere (other than to a literal meaning) for the correct interpretation.

- b. One possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is that we have here in idiomatic Jewish usage which must be interpreted according to Jewish patterns of speech and not by the way Gentiles use the same words. Study of the following passages in their contexts will reveal that the Semitic mind habitually expressed time sequences in relatively precise language whereas only an approximate time element is intended. (Cf. Gen. 42:17, 18; Esther 4:15-17; 5:1; 1 Kg. 12:5, 12; 20:29; 1 Sam. 30:12, 13; cf. even Cornelius' manner of reckoning time, Ac. 10:3-30. Or is the entire account retold from the Semitic standpoint of Peter or some other who served as Luke's informant?) Thus, this usage among the Hebrews of counting a part of a day for a whole day really existed. Further, the chronology of Jewish kings is notoriously problematic due to the habit (to us, frustrating) of counting a part of a year for an entire year. While this usage is perhaps strange to the western ear, this strangeness does not cancel its real existence in Semitic speech patterns. Taken in this sense, then, Jesus is speaking as a typical Semite when He says "three days and three nights," but means no more than "sometime within a period of three days more or less."
- c. Another possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is the fact that this expression is part of a sign, or a prophecy of things that must come to pass in the future, and like all prophecies, must be handled according to the normal exegetical rules governing the proper interpretation of prophecies. One such rule most pertinent here is that the sign, or prophecy, must be interpreted in the light of its actual fulfillment and not on the basis of any meaning attached to its words that would disregard

that fulfilment. This same prophecy, or sign, was stated literally elsewhere. (See under 4a above.)

- d. Jesus' Jewish enemies understood Him to mean less than 72 hours. (Mt. 27:62-64) Their testimony to the meaning of this expression is invaluable in that they were the most interested in seeing the failure of what they considered the most iniquitous imposture, and yet it was to this very class that Jesus addressed the sign in question in precisely the language recorded by Matthew.
- e. Luke names the days involved in the Last Week schedule of the death, burial and resurrection as "Friday (*paraskeuè*, translatable as "preparation" for some festival day, as here, the Sabbath, or rendered as the normal Greek word for Friday), Saturday (the Sabbath), and Sunday (the first day of the week). See Lk. 23:54—24:1. Matthew, though less obviously, is just as clear: "evening" after Jesus' crucifixion (Mt. 27:57), "Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation" (Mt. 27:62) or "sabbath" (28:1) and "first day of the week" (Mt. 28:1). Similarly, Mark follows much the same pattern: Mk. 15:42; 16:1, 2, as does John 19:31, 42; 20:1).

The great obstacle in question is not whether the story of Jonah be credible and worthy of God or not, for Jesus' authority vouches for its authenticity. The insurmountable problem lies in trying to prove that OT account to be anything but true history. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 61) argues that "if the story of Jonah is not history, it is, of course, a piece of fiction . . . which originated in the brain of an Israelite." But that this alternative is itself even more incredible than the view it is invented to supplant, is proven by the following considerations suggested by McGarvey:

1. "It is incredible . . . that any Israelite, capable of conceiving and of writing such a story, would be so irreverent toward one of the great prophets of his nation as to make him act the part ascribed to Jonah . . .
2. "It is still more incredible that the leaders of the chosen people at any period of their history would have allowed such a document a place among their sacred books . . .
3. "No Israelite, inventing a story of God's dealings with a great Gentile city like Nineveh, would have represented him as being so regardful of the welfare of its people, so quick to forgive their sins, and so tenderly mindful of the innocent within its

walls. Especially would no Israelite write a story whose culminating point was a stern rebuke of his nation for animosity toward an oppressive heathen power. . . .

4. "This incredibility is intensified when we consider the date assigned to the Book of Jonah by those who hold it to be fictitious. . . . A Jew of a later age would be the last man on earth to invent a story showing tender regard for (Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire) on the part of Israel's God. . . . The farther down the stream of time you bring the date of the book, the more incredible that it could have obtained the place which we know it did obtain in the sacred writings of the Jews."

While their arguments are largely based upon psychological probabilities, which in no sense can be considered mathematically certain however likely they may seem, and so could be rejected as hypotheses contrary to fact, still the canonization of Jonah's book by Jewish leaders is a fact, a fact that is explicable only on the hypothesis that its history was objectively too true and documented to permit them the right to reject it.

In the heart of the earth need mean no more than **within the earth**, since it is a common expression used without its literal signification. (Cf. Dt. 4:11; Ezek. 27:4, 25ff.; Jon. 2:3; Ps. 46:2) Nothing is here affirmed of the depth of Jesus' future entombment nor of the exact location of Hades, but simply the reality of that burial. It does not really matter whether He means simply the grave of Joseph of Arimathea or Hades, because for the purpose of the sign, the meaning is the same. (Cf. Lk. 23:43; Ac. 2:27, 31; Eph. 4:9; I Pet. 3:19?)

D. JESUS' CONDEMNATION WELL GROUNDED (12:41, 42)

1. NINEVITES HEARD ONLY THE PROPHET JONAH (12:41)

12:41 **The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it.** If God be the Judge, how is it true that ancient pagans could be said to **condemn** anyone? In the sense that anyone who fulfills what is required of all, condemns those who fail to do what was in their power, because the former prove that all **COULD** have done their duty and that any who do not do so are left without excuse for their failure. In this case the duty, required of both **the men of Nineveh** and the Jews of **this generation** in which Jesus lived, was repentance. God is still the Judge and He will be justified in the verdict He

renders against the unrepentant Jews by the fact that the Ninevites proved that repentance toward God is both humanly possible and the right reponse of the generosity of God.

But why would the Ninevites condemn this generation? Because Christ's preaching was based upon far better attested evidence than that of Jonah's. Did God accompany Jonah's ministry with the variety and abundance of undoubted supernatural evidences of the divine authority of his message, as He had done for His Son? If not, those Gentile Ninevites had far more reason to demand signs of that foreign prophet from a tiny subject kingdom than did this generation of God's chosen people, nevertheless those godless pagans repented and this nation of "God-fearing" Jews did not. Apparently the men of Nineveh received the marvelous story of Jonah's deliverance as sign enough and proof enough that he truly spoke for the living God, so they believed his message. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 56) imaginatively fills out the picture thus:

When he began to cry out in the streets of Nineveh, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' the question necessarily went from lip to lip, Who is this? The answer, that it was the great prophet of Israel, by whose supernatural foresight the victories of Jeroboam, running through a period of forty years, had been won, was enough to arrest solemn attention; but when it was added that on first receiving the command to come and utter this cry, he tried to escape the task by running away, and sailing far out upon the sea, but that Jehovah, who had given the command, overtook him, brought him back in the bowels of a fish, cast him out alive on dry land, and then renewed the command, this added tenfold power to the word of the prophet.

The Ninevites' honesty in receiving the sign and preaching offered them, however limited the number of signs and sermons, was still Gentile honesty, because it originated outside the pale of Jewish advantages and enlightenment. But the Jewish response to Jesus, coming as it did from a people endowed with four thousand years of rich history of the wonderful dealings of the living God, a people who, rather than face up to the moral responsibility required of them by the abundance and variety of signs provided them in support of the message of Jesus of Nazareth, would dare to demand some proof of His authority, can be described as nothing less than callous dishonesty and moral irresponsibility! God's standard of judgment here, as everywhere, is: "According to the light against which you have

sinned will be your judgment." (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jas. 4:17. Study other examples of Jesus' use of the superior quality of Gentiles' response to God despite great handicaps, in order to throw into greater contrast Jewish unbelief notwithstanding their excellent opportunities to know God and do far better. Mt. 8:10-12; cf. 15:22-28; Lk. 11:32; 13:23-30; 17:11-19; Mt. 21:43; 22:1-14. See also the examples where pagan cities, because of lack of opportunities, will be punished with less severity than privileged Jewish cities who knew Jesus: Mt. 10:15; 11:22-24; Lk. 10:12, 14.)

The men of Nineveh . . . shall condemn this generation. Here is further evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus' message, proof that He does not intend to express the aspiration of His age, for, instead of picturing the nation of Israel as standing in judgment of the Gentiles, He affirms that these Gentiles will condemn the Jews. Our limited knowledge of rabbinic thought current in Jesus' day does not permit us to pontificate about all the views of His contemporaries. However, we may timidly ask where was the rabbi that dared raise his voice to take so radical a view of Jewish culpability, as does Jesus here? We ask this, since we do not know who would have been spiritually mature enough as to be able to conceive an idea so inimical to all that Maccabeanism and its spiritual children stood for.

Further, Jesus clearly sees the outcome of judgment that only Jehovah could know with certainty. Who is this that dares place His own people on the balances with those penitent pagans only to find Israel condemned? Who is this that sees the outcome of the proclamation of His own death and resurrection so clearly as to be able to warn His people that the Jews of that age would reject that future sign and thus seal their fate?

They repented at the preaching of Jonah (*metenōēsan eis tò kérugma Ionâ*) "Faith-only" groups who would deny any connection between obedience to Christ in Christian baptism and remission of sins hope to sustain this theory by appeal to this passage and Lk. 11:32 as evidence for a special use of the Greek preposition *eis*. *Eis* is used in Ac. 2:38 in the phrase "for remission of sins" (*eis âfesisin tôn hamartiôn*) where most translators render the phrase: "for the remission, in order to receive forgiveness, so that your sins will be forgiven, etc." But since those, who exaggerate the *sola fede* principle as to exclude baptism from the plan of salvation, must dispose of the damaging evidence of such texts on salvation as Ac. 2:38; they think themselves to have found in the Greek phrase the solution to their quandary. Upon superficial examination of our texts (i.e. Mt. 12:41

and Lk. 11:32), it would seem that evidence for some other translation of the Greek preposition might have been discovered.

It is argued that the Ninevites repented *eis tò kérugma Ionâ*, i.e. "because of the preaching of Jonah." Therefore, it is said, it is proper to translate Ac. 2:38 in harmony with the "faith only" view as follows: "Repent . . . and be baptized . . . because of the forgiveness of your sins," i.e. because your sins have been forgiven. That there is a causal use of the preposition *eis* is affirmed by grammarians and lexicographers, as, for example, Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 104; Robertson and Davis, *New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 256; Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 227-229. However the best evidence upon which they affirm the causal use of *eis* is based principally upon Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:32. The weakness of this evidence lies in the fact that it ignores the usual meaning assigned to the word *kérugma*: "proclamation, announcement, preaching." (Arndt-Gingrich, 432) Nouns ending in *-ma* are regularly and primarily considered the result of the action implied in the verb from which they are formed. (Chamberlain, *Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 12) Thus, the *kérugma* of Jonah was not the action of preaching, but "the thing preached" by him, i.e. the message itself. While it is historically true that the Ninevites repented because Jonah preached to them (Jonah 3:5-10), this is not a proper translation of what Jesus said. Rather, Jesus said, ". . . for they turned to the message preached by Jonah . . ." (Mt. 12:41 and Lk. 11:32, Charles B. Williams's translation. Or, as Plummer (*Luke*, 307, 308) has it: "*In accordance with the preaching' they repented; i.e. they turned towards it and conformed to it; compare . . . 2 Tim. 2:26; or else, 'out of regard to it' they repented.*" That the repentance of the Ninevites was directed *toward (eis)* a definite end which formed the form and substance of Jonah's message is well-known. (Consider other examples of this use of *eis*: Jn. 3:16-19, 36; 1:12; 2:11, 23; 6:29, 35, 40; Ac. 10:43; 14:23; 19:4; 20:21; 24:24; Ro. 10:9, 10; Ac. 20:21; 2 Tim. 2:25; Ac. 26:18; 11:18; Lk. 24:47) Thus a well-meant attempt to prove that Peter meant "be baptized because your sins have already been forgiven" fails of necessary proof, because it cannot be sustained from our present text. The repentance of the Ninevites was their definite move *toward (eis)*, their willing entrance *into (eis)* harmony with all that was the burden of Jonah's message. Whereas their former conduct had led them to turn their backs upon righteousness, sobriety and fear of God, the kind of conduct which was the very opposite to that which Jonah's oracle

proclaimed, their repentance was their personal commitment to (eis) all the moral implications that his *kérugma* demanded.

Behold, a greater than Jonah is here. (Cf. this saying with 12:6 with which Matthew places it in context. Is *pleton*, "more," different in practical emphasis from *meizon*, "greater"?) Lenski (*Matthew*, 495) is right to notice that the "neuter *pleton* includes everything the Jews had in Christ." Jesus is claiming that right in the presence of these dishonest critics and prejudiced authorities was something far more important, **something of greater proportions than Jonah.** Whereas the neuter **something** might tend to draw the mind to the many, convincing signs that had characterized His ministry, or perhaps to the ministry itself, the very mention of the man **Jonah** as the standard of comparison brings us back to the unstated implication: "I, Jesus, am greater than that inspired prophet whose message called forth from his pagan audience the most amazing demonstration of repentance!" He is fully justified in severely censuring His own people, since He had already proven Himself, beyond any reasonable doubt, to be superior to the great prophets of the past to whom these Pharisees gave full honors and yet pretended to be unable to recognize the proper Messianic identity and dignity of Jesus.

2. THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH HEARD ONLY SOLOMON (12:42)

12:42 **The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.** This is obviously a second example reinforcing the point stated in the foregoing illustration, and, as such, becomes the historical validation of those OT texts. (1 Kg. 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12) Here again the same arguments are valid that were used in reference to the historicity of Jonah, for, had the Pharisees been able to deny that the Queen of the South ever came to Palestine to visit Solomon, or that Solomon really never possessed his fabled wisdom, then they could also have retorted: "Your claim to possess a wisdom superior to that of Solomon is an empty boast."

The Queen of the South had received authentic, though somewhat partial, news of Solomon's wisdom. Her felt need, her longing for greater wisdom than she possessed, was sufficient to cause her to make the long, arduous journey, ignoring the hardships, dangers, time and expense involved, to hear him. Her diligence in seeking out that wisdom stands in bold contrast to the attempted neutrality and cold indifference of Jesus' own people. She was also outside the

influence of the Mosaic economy, hence, not blessed with the enormous advantages and opportunities to know God as did the chosen people. Therefore, even though it was the famed wisdom of Solomon that drew her, by which the Lord glorified Himself in him, and even though she felt compelled to exclaim her praise for Jehovah his God for His love for Israel that had placed such a man on the throne, yet there is no impelling evidence in the OT record that she was converted to Hebrew monotheism, since her "acknowledgement of Jehovah as Israel's God, was reconcilable with polytheism." (Keil, *Kings*, 160) And this is what we would expect of her: that she return to her own realm with serious doubts about her former paganism, that she live up to the light available to her. In the record she speaks consistently of Jehovah as "your God," as if she did not claim Him as her own. (Cf. 1 Kg. 10:9; 2 Chron. 9:8)

The wisdom of Solomon, the point of comparison here, was of a practical sort, the best human psychology for excellent human relations. But its origin was a God-given gift that manifested itself in the finest practical philosophy man has yet seen. This is at the same time its greatness and its limitation, since it was not particularly presented as a divine revelation to save men from their sins. There were definite religious overtones and a positively religious basis, but Solomon sought his psycho-sociological orientation within the religious framework of the Mosaic system. (Study *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* to sense this.) The most religious maxims in his work presuppose a complete religious system explained elsewhere.

With this view of **the Queen of the South** and of **the wisdom of Solomon**, we begin to discern that the second illustration is not exactly equal to the first. Rather, Jesus has moved, with excellent rhetorical effect, to an illustration involving a pagan who, though deeply moved by her contact with Hebrew monotheism, apparently did not become converted to it, in contrast with the Ninevites who actually repented. Further, in contrast to the preaching of a divinely inspired message by Jonah, we have in this illustration only the **wisdom of Solomon**. As a seeker after truth and as an expounder of great wisdom and knowledge, **Solomon and the Queen of the South** make an excellent point of contrast where-with Jesus may censure His own privileged age. Solomon's truly great erudition was so far inferior to the grand revelations of Him who is the Wisdom of God personified, and yet God's own people could not recognize that same Wisdom right in their midst, in their own land! And, as will be discussed in connection with Jesus' use of parables to hide truth about the Kingdom while, at the same time

revealing it, we see that the Jews in general did not take the trouble to understand what was not clear and well-founded in the message of Christ. They just wrote Him off as a religious fanatic. Despite their great advantages to know by personal investigation, they just did not care that much about truth.

Greater than Solomon: on the neuter *pleion* see on 12:41 and on *meizon* at 12:6. Here again the neuter (*pleion*) speaks of all that Christ represented to the Jewish people. He had been laying before them the eternal wisdom of God and they did nothing, but scorn it. But that ancient queen condemns not only those unbelievers, but all who cannot discern in this young rabbi from Nazareth "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Co. 2:3) nor see in the face of Christ "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." (2 Co. 4:4, 6)

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from Jesus' words is that every man is judged according to the light against which he has sinned. What would the Lord say to the Twentieth Century? "You have enjoyed even greater opportunities to investigate the truth, granted the historical perspective of twenty centuries. The Christians who lived out their lives in the early years of the Church and sought out the truth, with far less advantages that you, will rise up in judgment against your generation to the very extent that it does not live up to its privileges and the knowledge of God's will that it could have obtained." Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 56) rightly concludes that "in Jesus we are confronted with God; and the one real question in life is: 'What is our reaction when we are confronted with God in Jesus Christ?'" Do we see in Him a revelation of God greater than the inspired prophets of the Old Testament, a wisdom greater than the wisest man who has ever lived? Do we bend every effort to know the truth, regardless of the expense involved, and then, having found it, submit to it, even to the extent of the humiliation of repentance?

E. WARNING: THE DANGER OF THE UNCOMMITTED LIFE (12:43-45)

Earlier (11:16-19), Jesus had described the moral caliber of His generation by dramatizing them as fickle children playing in the marketplace whom no one could satisfy. Here His tone is graver as He likens them to a demonized man! (Cf. Lk. 11:24-26) This is a parable illustrating the fundamental impossibility of neutrality, indecision and inaction where truth can be known and when that truth requires a positive response. The text for this story may well

be 12:30 (Cf. Lk. 11:23 as context for this same illustration.)

But the unclean spirit (cf. Mt. 10:1; Mk. 1:23; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; Lk. 4:33; 6:18; 9:42) **When he is gone out of the man:** by what instrumentality the demon leaves his victim, Jesus does not say. Since the demon thinks himself free to return to his old habitation (12:44) and proves his thesis correct (12:45), we might conclude that the demon was not cast out by Jesus, for His stern rebuke, given in the case of the demonized boy, specifically forbade the demon's return. (Cf. Mk. 9:25) Considering the completeness of Jesus' cures, many presume His practice to have been uniform and His attitude the same at all other times. On the other hand, demons are not notoriously obedient to the will of God however expressed. Further, the very prohibition of the demon's return in the case cited suggests that, had Jesus not so spoken, the demon would have returned. **Passeth through waterless places: why waterless?** Is this an example of Jesus' accommodation of His language to a popular superstition connected with contemporary demonology? Or is He actually revealing something that demons really do? (Cf. Isa. 34:14; Baruch 4:35; Tobit 8:3) Concerning this problematic expression McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 15) wrote:

While it would be hazardous to make it the 'basis of a demonology for which he is to be held responsible,' he certainly is to be held responsible for the remark itself. If an evil spirit, when he left a man, did not frequent waterless places, I should be glad to learn from Professor T. what kind of places he did frequent.

The critics are thus forced by Jesus' assertion to prove that demons do NOT in fact frequent arid areas, in order to demonstrate His words as mere accommodation to popular demonologies. The present state of their knowledge of demons does not permit them such pontifical powers. They too are dependent upon the Gospel narratives for much of their information on this subject and merely betray an unscientific bias when they begin arbitrarily to sift out what information seems to suit their preconceived notions as to what can be true about demons. **Seeking rest and finding it not** may be just part of the scenery of the parable and intended to reveal nothing about the spirit world. It serves to explain why the unclean spirit wanted to return to his old habitat. But this rigidly limited information does not permit us to speculate further about the mentality or habits of demons.

It might well be questioned whether Jesus intends to provide us

a rudimentary lesson in demonology while teaching on an entirely different subject, and not rather a simple parable the details of which are not to be pressed to provide information on demons. That this is a parable is clear not only from the moral indicated at its close, but also from its application to the Jewish unbelievers. But to describe this story as a "parable," does not need to imply that what Jesus says about demons therein must, therefore, be impossible or incorrect so far as it goes. Even though this information may not have been offered to provide some insight into demonology, nevertheless it could have been just as much to Jesus' purpose to give us correct information on demons as to invent a fable to teach His truth, even though fables function remarkably well to reveal a truth. The Lord knows better than anyone then or now how demons act and is probably speaking accordingly in this parable. If He did not speak in harmony with reality, we cannot know it and He certainly missed an excellent opportunity to cast some light onto that dark page of spiritual reality. Granted, His major thrust has nothing to do with demonology, but with what is the fundamental meaning and application of this story, i.e., the empty heart of a Judaism purified but uncommitted. But though this is admittedly a question of probabilities and not one of certainties, yet, until we are prepared to demonstrate the details of Jesus' story to be unrealistic in their portrayal of demonic thought or behavior, we remain dependent upon His words for any information we have.

The man who is the victim of the demon's caprice is **this evil generation** (12:45), so what happens to him is but a picture of the vicissitudes of Jesus' contemporaries who were even then rejecting Him. The fortunes of the demonized man represent the nation under the present spiritual domination of the scribes and Pharisees and the party bosses of the other movements and parties competing for the attention of the nation. Because Jesus' mention of **the last state of the man** (12:45) suggests an earlier period when lesser evils plagued him, and as this last stage of his condition coincided with **this evil generation**, it is necessary to recognize the historical precedents that lay the groundwork for his later condition. A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, Synoptic Gospels, 193) thinks that:

It is not at all likely that Christ's view was limited to the period dating from John's ministry. Moral laws need large spaces of time for adequate exemplification. The most instructive exemplification of the degeneracy described is supplied by the period from Ezra till Christ's time. With Ezra

was ended *material* idolatry. But from that period dates the reign of legalism, which issued in Rabbinism, a more subtle and pernicious idolatry of the *letter*, the more deadly that it wore the fair aspect of zeal for God and righteousness.

Jesus is painting the outlines of Jewish history in which the nation has been liberated of its bent for idolatry since the time of the Babylonian exile and remained free from its allurements during the Maccabean revival. But this temporary repentance from the worship of wooden gods was merely succeeded by a reverence for the letter of God's law which proved so fatal to the true spirit of the worship and true service of God. Into the shrine, emptied of its idolatries, had swept the Pharisean scrupulosity and Sadducean liberalism, Herodian worldliness, the unrealism of the Essenes and the nationalistic bigotry of the Zealots, all so much more deadly because the old gods had been merely substituted by anything but submission to God. Is the superficial repentance and revival partially a reference to the flurry of religious activity promoted by the disciples of John the Baptist who had not also become disciples of the Christ? Is there also a reference here to the activity of Jesus, intended to bless and free Israel from the very evils to which it must necessarily fall victim when **this evil generation** will finally crucify Him who is their last hope?

12:44 **Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out.** The demon still considers it his own dwelling, as God had not been invited in to occupy every room in it. **My house**, as a phrase, does not decide the question whether the demon has been driven out, for he could still describe his former habitation this way, even if driven out, especially if he suspected it yet empty of occupancy since his departure.

And when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. **Empty** (*scholazonta*, "unoccupied, standing empty"), not occupied by any compelling force, not positively committed to any cause, neutral. Why should Israel remain uncommitted to the will of God in the face of the great issues with which it was continually faced?

1. The man on the street was probably too absorbed in the every day business of making a living to concern himself seriously in seeking out and submitting himself to the truth.
2. Others, confused by the great debates between the learned rabbis, may have excused themselves on the basis of theological incompetence and so left it to the experts.
3. Yet others, seeing the truth and admitting that Jesus was right,

were afraid to take an unpopular stand.

4. Others may have desired merely to be left alone, since they wished to be undisturbed by hard decisions.
5. Some may have begun to grasp the spirit of adventure involved in the spiritual messiahship of Christ, but preferred the security of the old ways, rather than launch out taking the risks required by the adventure.

There were probably as many reasons as there were people who held back and, for one reason or another, did not bow to the will of God in Jesus Christ. But in all these excuses there is one common element. Morgan (*Matthew*, 135) describes this spiritual vacuum in the heart of Israel: "There was no indweller, possessing, holding, mastering . . ." (Contrast with this state of affairs: Ro. 8:9; 1 Co. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph. 2:21, 22; Jn. 14:23.) Jesus' criticism cuts to the heart of Judaism: "Your religion has only made you empty; it cannot fill you. It leaves you the easy victim of any power that can fill that vacuum!"

Swept clean of all the repulsive foulness of idolatry and heathenism. **Garnished** (*kekosmēménon*, Arndt-Gingrich, 445: "1. Put in order; 2. Adorn, decorate."), but not filled. Decorated with the external beauty of Pharisaic devotion to the study and practice of the letter of the Law, the nation was living an outwardly reformed life characterized by empty virtue and hypocrisy and hollow ceremonies. God is not there, the only One who could have successfully resisted Satan. (Cf. 12:29)

12:45 **Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.** A total of eight spirits is not unusual, since the Gospel writers describe cases of multiple demonization. (Lk. 8:2; Mk. 5:9=Lk. 8:30) **Spirits more evil:** what could be more repulsive, more foul than idolatry? Pride, unbelief, fanaticism, greed, self-righteousness, formalism, hypocrisy and, worst of all, rejection of Israel's Messiah! It must be noted here that Jesus never confuses demon-possession for sinfulness, nor does He ever identify demons simply with sins or even temptations to sin. Let us not make that mistake either. Nevertheless, it is very true that the basic teaching of this parable, which speaks exclusively of real demons as the basis of comparison, may find splendid application in reference to the vacuous religious life out of which certain evil practices have been removed without transforming the resulting idleness into positive Christian activity that leaves no room nor time for evil because filled with all

the fulness of God. **Dwell there** (*katoikeē*): just as God is said to dwell in the Temple, i.e. make His permanent abode there (cf. Mt. 23:21, *katoikōsmēnē*), so these demons wander no longer, but take full possession of their victim. There is nothing said here of a forced entry into the dwelling, since there is everything about the house to invite habitation and nothing to prohibit it. The first demon did not need the others to help him force an entrance, nor are they described as being especially "stronger than he." They are only **more evil than he**.

And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. This sentence is the turning point in the Lord's parable, belonging as well to the application as to the story itself. Vicious evils, both more in number and virulence than those once repented of, can take over the unfilled life. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:20; Jn. 5:14; Heb. 6:6; 10:26f.) And with these evils, of course, comes the attendant responsibility and greater guilt. (Jn. 15:22-24) **Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation.** While this statement, stated in the future tense, menaces a dreadful future, there is still opportunity to repent. Plummer (*Matthew*, 185) observes:

They have not reached this desperate condition yet, but they are in danger of it, and some of them will reach it. The warning is similar to that about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which He does not say that they have committed, although they were near it.

But this hope is almost academic, since the very nature of this spiritual hardness practically eliminates the possibility that Israel would yet turn to God in any great numbers. **This evil generation** (*tē geneā tautē tē ponērā*) is no merely technical, eschatological term referring to the entire Hebrew race clear down to the last trumpet. On the contrary, it is a practical expression that precisely pinpoints Jesus' accusation upon the Jews then living and rejecting the real life and hope He was even then offering. (Cf. Mt. 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 17:17; 16:4; 23:36; 24:34; Lk. 11:29-32, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:32) **This generation** means those people who, with the living lessons of Hebrew religion before their eyes and with the echo of the voice of John the Baptist ringing in their ears, had merely cleaned up their lives superficially, removing only the grosser, cruder sins of the flesh but leaving untouched the sins of the spirit and the depleted spiritual power and untenanted temple of their hearts. They had not surrendered the habitation and control of their life to its rightful Owner. (Study Malachi 3) By leaving the word **generation** general

and unapplied, the Lord leaves the hearer free to feel its implications either in the formal expression of the Jewish life and religion or in his own personal emptiness before God. By attacking Judaism at its best and finding it wanting, Jesus' own message stands out as the only true alternative. Thus, the Lord has met the opposition by claiming that His teaching was absolutely essential to fill human need, leaving no place for the return of the vileness that had so permeated its existence before. This is a clear claim to absolute religious authority, if not to Deity itself, because, after all, who could speak with such finality about the whole generation of which he is a part and be unable to find any redeeming feature in its people, its priesthood, its government, its religion, its popular ideals, its practical ethics and its national hopes? The Lord had already explained His charge. (Cf. 12:39 Notes) That **evil generation** felt the full blow of Jesus' condemnation when God permitted the Romans to destroy them to the uttermost within just a few short years after this pronouncement, never to rise again for nearly two millenia. (1 Th. 2:16)

It is interesting to observe that this vigorous battle of ideas began with the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus was demon-possessed (Mk. 3:22, 30), but Jesus does not terminate it without first proving conclusively that the Jews themselves were so very much like a man repossessed by eight vicious demons! But this is no mere tit for tat rebuttal or name-calling, because Jesus can see the true nature of His people more clearly than any other contemporary observer. But He is no Judge to remain in the ivory tower of heaven to condemn but a compassionate Savior who labored incessantly to save that very generation! Instead of complacency and self-justification, we find in Him that deep concern and pained patriotism that longs for the salvation of these very opponents who refuse to see that their very accusation itself is symptomatic of the disease which they believe to diagnose in Him.

From the Master's application of His parable, we are able to discern profound lessons for ourselves, suggested by Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 57):

1. The mere removal of a few of the fouler, more repulsive sins of which we are guilty, and the temporary victories over Satan, must not be confused for the final, decisive triumph over sin. So long as self is alive in the individual, the evil once banished from his life has not yet been destroyed. This is why the total filling of one's life with all the fulness

of Christ is so very important. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17-19)

2. Out of the foregoing comes the observation that mere negative religion can never suffice to hold virulent evil at bay. Those whose piety consists entirely of the observance of God's prohibitions are only half-armed against the assaults of Satan whose delight is unbounded when he can convince anyone that doing nothing is as good and useful for the promotion of godliness as doing positive acts of useful helpfulness to others.
3. Consequently, the Church that would keep her converts permanently saved from sin will find this task easy in proportion to her success in giving them Christian work to do.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the position of the scribes and Pharisees in Judaism, showing the theoretic reasonableness of the request they made of Jesus.
2. Explain why Jesus' refusal to comply with their request is more reasonable than the request itself.
3. Explain why Jesus complied with their request, even though He had sufficient grounds for refusing.
4. In what way was Jonah "a sign" to the Ninevites? Does Luke 11:30 relate here?
5. In what way, was Jesus to be "a sign" to His generation?
6. Narrate briefly the story of Jonah's ministry to Ninevah showing the relevance of Jesus' use of that experience as proof of His identity. In what respect is the sign that Jesus offers the scribes and Pharisees similar to Jonah's experience?
7. Explain the judicial principle involved in the fact that both the Ninevites and the Queen of the South will "stand up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it." How is it possible for one group of human beings to condemn another group of people, all of which are imperfect?
8. What is that "something greater than" either Jonah or Solomon? Did Jesus intend two separate items that in each case are greater than the two men named, or did He mean one item of surpassing value, illustrated from two separate angles? Are there other possible translations of this phrase that shed a different light on the meaning? Why is this "something" actually greater?
9. What "generation" was the object of Jesus' condemnation of "this generation"?

10. State the occasion upon which Jesus had spoken of His resurrection as a "sign" before this. Note whatever similarities may exist between the several situations in which He gave this sign.
11. Explain the Jewish usage involved in the phrases: "three days and three nights." What do the Gospel writers describe as the fulfilment of this expression?
12. Did Jesus fulfil the "sign of Jonah"? How? When?
13. How does the story of the seven demons in a beautiful apartment connect with Jesus' teaching on signs and on repentance?
14. What is repentance, as illustrated in the account of Jonah?
15. How much may be learned about demonology from the story of the demon here narrated? If nothing, why not? If so, what information is to be gained?
16. Explain how that generation of Jews was like the demon-possessed man.

Section 30

JESUS REFUSES TO ALLOW FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM

(Parallels: Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

TEXT: 12:46-50

46. While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him.
47. And one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee.
48. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?
49. And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!
50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss Jesus' personal manner of life: Where was His home? What was His trade or craft? What means of support had He during His ministry? What were some of His personal habits or practices? How would you analyze Jesus of Nazareth as a human being? Do not try to dodge the issue by saying He is