

“The Sign of Jonah”—Matthew 12:38-45

Brandon Holiski
Southern Oaks Baptist Church
July 24, 2022

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Matthew 12...

Today we will venture into a new (but related) section of Matthew 12. As in previous weeks, I'm going to read a larger chunk of text than we will have time to cover today, but I think it's important for us to see how these passages relate with one another, so I want to make some preliminary remarks on that relationship in a moment. But before that, let's do the most important thing and read the text of God's Word. I'll begin reading in verse 38. Follow along as I do...

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’³⁹ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.⁴³ When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none.⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order.⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.’” (Matthew 12:38-45)

This is God's Word...

I have chosen to read both of these paragraphs together (12:38-42 and 12:43-45), though most English translations opt to separate them. This is owing to the fact that it is not immediately obvious how verses 43 to 45 fit with either what comes before or what comes after. These verses convey a parable of sorts that has proven a challenge to many interpreters over the years (including myself), but what I hope to show you this week and next is that its message relates to both the preceding and following verses. That said, I have opted to read them with the previous paragraph today because of the repetition that exists within these paragraphs, which certainly is not accidental.

You'll notice that Jesus speaks of this “generation” four different times (12:39, 41, 42, 45), each time underscoring the unbelief of His contemporaries. He calls them an “evil” and “adulterous” generation, contrasting them with previous generations who possessed few of their advantages and yet responded to the message of God in faith. In verses 43 to 45, Jesus then speaks parabolically of the unbelieving generation to show that Israel, by and large, will be worse off having rejected Jesus than it was prior to His appearing. But by beginning and concluding the verses we just read with reference to the “*evil [and adulterous] generation*,” Matthew clues us in on the fact that there is a relationship between these sections.

Now what is it that prompts Jesus to label this generation as “*evil and adulterous*”? It's the request the Pharisees, now joined by the scribes, make of Him in verse 38—“*Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.*”

Does that strike you as an odd thing to say? It should. Not because it's unusual for people to desire signs—it is certainly not—but because of all the miraculous moments they have already observed, not least of which the casting out of a demon, which restored a man's sight and speech (12:22), and the healing of the man with a withered hand (12:9-14). Hadn't they seen enough already? Absolutely! And John's Gospel gives evidence of that fact when it tells the story of one of their number—a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus—coming to Jesus under the cover of darkness, stating, “*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him*” (John 3:2). Nicodemus didn't understand everything about Jesus, but he had seen enough to concede that Jesus' signs were real and evinced that God was with Him, the very conclusions that the Pharisees of Matthew 12 have been laboring to deny and cast doubt upon.

So when these Pharisees come, in verse 38, expressing a desire for a sign,¹ it seems a bit disingenuous in context. And, indeed, when you compare Matthew's account of these events with parallel passages in Mark and Luke, you discover that their true desire is to put Jesus to the test (Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; cf. Matt 16:1-4). Their desire, in other words, is wicked. No wonder Jesus says, in the following verse, “*an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign*” (Matt 12:39). If they would be satisfied by signs, they would be satisfied by now. They can claim all they want that they don't have enough evidence to make a decision about Jesus, but that is just not the case. This reminds us, as one commentator puts it, that “[u]nderneath intellectual doubt there is sometimes (but not always) a heart that does not want to know the answer.”² And “*blasphemy against the Spirit*,” as we saw last time, is certainly indicative of a settled defiance.

When Jesus says that their sign-seeking is the mark of “*an evil and adulterous generation*,” it would have called to mind, for any Jew, the quintessential example of this from the Scriptures—the wilderness generation that the Lord denied entrance into the Promised Land (e.g., Deut 1:35; 35:5, 20).³ You might remember that they too were a people who demanded signs from their deliverer (Moses), quarreling with him and testing the Lord (Exod. 17:2, 7).

But more troubling, in the context of Matthew's Gospel, is how eerily reminiscent this exchange between the religious leaders and Jesus is to a previous exchange between the devil and Jesus. In Matthew 4, you may recall, we found the account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. In the original language, the verb for “tempt” (πειράζω) in Matthew 4 is the same verb for “test” that we find elsewhere when the Pharisees are asking for a sign from Jesus (cf. Matt 4:1; 16:1; Luke 4:2; 11:16; Mark 8:11). In both cases, Jesus is asked to give some public performance, some miraculous “spectacles that would compel belief.”⁴ In both instances “the demand comes from a position of rejection.”⁵ And in both instances Jesus will have nothing of it. To the devil, He says, “*Again, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’*” (Matt 4:7). To the scribes and Pharisees, He shows how the request is what one would expect of “*an evil and adulterous generation*” (12:39).

Can you see the irony at this point? Do you see it? Were not the Pharisees just accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan? Weren't they insinuating that His miracles were done by the power of the evil one, Beelzebul, the prince of demons? Jesus then shows that His behavior doesn't look anything like what one would expect of someone doing the devil's work. And yet, as the story progresses, the behavior of the Pharisees is looking more and more Satanic, isn't it? They are now pulling a page out the devil's playbook, trying to trip Jesus up with the same trap that the devil used in chapter 4. In fighting against Jesus, they are fighting *with* the devil. No wonder Jesus said to them, in verse 30, “*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*” And the irony of it all is that the outwardly pious men have become the kind of people they claim to hate, pawns in hand of the evil one, parroting his own slander and deception. “*Like Satan*,” writes Daniel Doriani, “they tempt Jesus to perform spectacular signs and avoid the cross (4:5–6; 12:38; 16:1). Like Satan, they plot to kill Jesus (12:14; 21:45–46; 23:32–35).”⁶

But Jesus, when they come to Him for a sign, doesn't give them what they want, but did you notice what He does? He points them to God's Word. They come for a display of revelatory power, but Jesus points them to the pages of God's revealed Word. Perhaps there is a lesson in there for some of you in this place. You desire so much for God to reveal His will to you in the sky or spell out some answer in your alphabet cereal—or

whatever the modern equivalent is to reading tea leaves, casting out fleeces, and interpreting liver shivers—but could it be that you’re looking for answers in the wrong places? Could it be that the feeling in your gut is just indigestion? Maybe God would have you look in His Word too. How often is our desire for signs merely a symptom of laziness. We don’t want to do the work of study; we just want someone to tell us the answer. So we pray for quick answers, all the while neglecting the answers that God has already given in His Word. Things haven’t changed all that much in our day. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

R. C. Sproul once wrote,

“[I]f we want a sign from God, all we need to do is open our Bibles. If we want to see the transcendent power of almighty God at work before our very eyes, we should read and listen to the Scriptures. It is God’s Word, and there is no force on this planet as powerful as that Word. The critics attack it day in and day out, committing vandalism as they try to neutralize, diminish, or destroy the power of the Word. But it will not go away, because it is filled with the power of God. It has been turning people’s lives upside down since it was inspired by the Holy Spirit...People want to look up in the sky and see a message from God written there. Of course, even that would not make a difference. James Montgomery Boice used to say: ‘If God decided to give the world a sign about Jesus, He could arrange the stars in the sky in such a way that they would spell out the message, “Jesus is My only begotten Son.” But if God did that, people would simply say, “I wonder what astronomical perturbation caused that chance alignment in the stars?”’ He was right. No one would believe a message written in the stars any more than they believe the Bible, because they are part of an evil and adulterous generation. They do not believe because they do not *want* to believe.”⁷

Again, the more things change, the more things stay the same. Should we really be surprised to find that God would likewise have us look to His Word for answers instead of seeking signs elsewhere? I should think not. Yet Jesus doesn’t want these religious leaders to *just* consider biblical history for its own sake. He wants them to look back in order to understand something about Him and His works. Scripture points to Him after all. He says, “*no sign will be given...except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*” And then He begins connecting the dots, in verse 40. “*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,*” Jesus says, “*so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*”

Most of you know how this story of Matthew ends. Jesus will be killed on the cross, buried in a tomb, but on the third day he comes back to life. It seems clear, then, that this is a prediction of His resurrection. The resurrection is the ultimate sign of Jesus, that *signals* that He was who He claimed to be and that His death accomplished what it was meant to accomplish. The once-dead-now-alive Jesus is vindicated by the resurrection. This is the greatest sign that could be given. “If we will not acquiesce to it, we will not benefit from the ministry of Jesus.” This miracle is at the heart of the Christian faith. To reject it is “to remain in the ranks of the scribes and the Pharisees, an ‘evil and adulterous generation.’”⁸ And, as Paul said, “*if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain... your faith is futile...you are still in your sins...and we are all people most to be pitied*” (1 Cor 15:14, 17, 19).

Is it any wonder then that the resurrection is so frequently attacked by skeptics of Christianity? And this verse is one example of how even the predictions of the resurrection have been questioned. How so? Well, it’s not unusual for skeptics of God’s Word to point out that the text here suggests that Jesus will be buried for “*three days and three nights,*” when in fact He was *not* buried for three full days. He was dead and buried only from Friday dusk to Sunday dawn. So what we have here, they allege, is a biblical contradiction.

Yet, what we actually have, when such accusations are made is a display of modern ignorance of both the language of the Old Testament and first century conventions related to accounting the elapse of time. First, the reason the wording is “*three days and three nights*” is because that is the language we find in Jonah 1:17, which Jesus is here alluding to. But it’s also pretty widely understood that in those days (and in many contexts, even in our day) “three days” could be a shorthand for part of three days, not necessarily a full 72 hours (cf. Matt 16:21;

27:63).⁹ Jesus spoke (and Matthew wrote) in the language conventions that were common in that day, not our own, so modern readers need to understand those conventions to grasp the meaning of the text (and to spare themselves both the embarrassment of ascribing error to the text when there is none and the sin of chronological snobbery). As Sproul once wrote, “Jesus saw no need to change the vocabulary He used to communicate to people in the first century in order to shut the mouths of the obstreperous [i.e., clamorous, lacking restraint] in the twenty-first century.”¹⁰

Aside from the matter of chronology, there are some interesting parallels between the story of Jonah and the story of Jesus (though there are also many distinctions between Jonah and Jesus as well). Rodney Reeves, in his commentary, teases out some attractive points of contact:

“Like Jonah, Jesus was rocking the boat of their world. As the story goes, the passengers had determined (with Jonah’s help!) that the prophet was the problem—that as soon as they threw him overboard, the storm would pass, the seas would be calmed, and Jonah’s fate would be left to God (Jonah 1:4–17). The way Jesus saw it, the Pharisees were in the same boat. They had already determined (with Jesus’s help!) that the Galilean prophet needed to be thrown overboard—killed—to calm the storm of their religious world. That’s why they asked him for a sign, hoping to prove that Jesus was a false prophet according to Deuteronomy 13:1–4.... Ironically, *they would be the very ones* who played a significant part in ensuring the sign came true.”¹¹

We might say that the sailors cast Jonah into the depths of the sea because the prophet said that his death would ensure their deliverance from death, and we know that Jesus was cast into the depths of the grave that those responsible for His death might know deliverance from death.¹²

Yet the text, it must be said, is more focused on contrasting the scribes and Pharisees to the Ninevites to whom Jonah preached (not the sailors who encountered Jonah on the boat). This is clear in verse 41.

“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:41)

If you have never read the book of Jonah in the Old Testament, I would encourage you to do it this afternoon. It’s very short. Just four chapters. You could read it in less than ten minutes. No joke. And if you have some extra time, check out our sermon series online that works through the book in a detailed fashion, focusing on how the story points us to Jesus. The series was called “Gospel Intervention,” if you’re curious, because we can barely scratch the surface of the riches of the book of Jonah today. But essentially Jonah is the story of a reluctant prophet, who eventually finds himself in Nineveh, the major city (and eventual capital) of Assyria, preaching a message of judgment. Though no one would have expected the pagan Ninevites to take this Israelite prophet seriously, they do. The people of Nineveh, from top to bottom, repent before God and the Lord has mercy on them.

Did Jonah offer any signs to compel the faith of the Ninevites? No. There were no signs performed among them. He performed no miracles. He simply walked around the city, calling out, “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*” (Jonah 3:4). If anything, you might say that Jonah *himself* was the sign. He was the sign because he spent “*three days and three nights*” in the belly of a sea monster before being vomited up on the shore in his roundabout journey to Nineveh.¹³ The fact that he was alive was a sign for the Ninevites.

But, again, how did the people of Nineveh respond to the prophet Jonah? Surprisingly well! They repented. That was a big twist in the story. And Jesus is showing the religious leaders that there is a big twist in their story too. One might have expected that the most religious Jews of the day—like the devout Pharisees and the experts in God’s Law (scribes)—would have been the first to recognize God’s promised Messiah and respond to Him rightly. But there’s a twist. He came. And they rejected Him. They responded like one might have expected pagans to respond to God’s chosen messenger. Poorly. Defiantly. With murderous intent. They rejected the one

greater than Jonah and they would soon reject the greater sign that He would embody in the resurrection.¹⁴ They had every advantage that the Ninevites lacked, but they responded wickedly instead of humbly like the men and women of Nineveh. The Ninevites listened to Jonah. These Israelites would not listen to the one to whom Jonah pointed, the greater Jonah. And it would cost them, for Jesus said, “*The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here*” (Matt 12:41).¹⁵ We’ve seen Jesus say something similar in the previous chapter in response to the unbelieving generation of that day:

“Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.’” (Matthew 11:20-24)

Same idea. Same evil and adulterous generation being warned. Same tragic reality and outcome because they failed to repent and believe in the face of authority that would have compelled even the most notorious sinners of old.

But Jesus heaps more shame on the scribes and Pharisees when He calls to mind another Gentile who was famously drawn to the wisdom of God unlike these men. Look at verse 42...

“The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42)

This “*queen of the South*” is usually referred to as “the queen of Sheba,” who traveled many miles to meet with Israel’s king to glean from his wisdom (1 Kings 10).¹⁶ She too came to test him (10:1), but, after conversing with Solomon, she freely acknowledged his unsurpassed wisdom and the Lord’s hand in making Solomon king. Another pagan responding well to God’s anointed (10:6-9). Meanwhile, the scribes and Pharisees refuse to submit to Christ’s wisdom and acknowledge Him as King. They spurn the one greater than Solomon. Once again these pagan Gentiles are putting the covenant people to shame. And this irony will be reflected at the final judgment. And, by the way, this also plays into a larger theme in Matthew’s Gospel that I have pointed out along the way—the theme of the Gospel being not just for the Jews, but for the nations (i.e. the Gentiles). Highlighting the response of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba feeds into that theme, and helps the first readers see that God has always had a heart for the nations (cf. Matt 8:5-13; 28:19). “All can repent, find forgiveness, and seek the wisdom of Jesus.”¹⁷

But there is another theme that Jesus is pressing into us throughout this chapter—the theme of Christ’s superiority to heroes and institutions of Israel’s past. We don’t have time to reexamine all that has come before, but we can attempt to bring together something that Matthew has repeatedly stressed in this chapter, namely, that in the person and work of Jesus the people should recognize that “*something greater than the temple is here*” (12:6), “*something greater than Jonah is here*” (12:41), and “*something greater than Solomon is here*” (12:42; cf. David, 12:4). Jesus (and Matthew) could have highlighted other people and things that Jesus is superior to, so why these in particular? Because these examples call to mind the three major offices that Jesus fulfills—the office of priest (greater than the temple), prophet (greater than Jonah), and king (greater than Solomon). We are being taught, in a very Jewish way, that Jesus is greater than Israel’s greatest heroes and institutions, He was the one that they were pointing to in their best moments. They were shadows. He is the substance, the reality. All of it preparing the people for the arrival of Jesus, pointing ahead to Jesus, preparing the way for Jesus...and here He stands, right in front of the people most acquainted with those advantages, and they don’t recognize Him. They missed Him. More than that...they reject Him.

A few weeks ago, when we were considering what this chapter warns against spiritual apathy and indecision, I used a biblical example—the example of Pilate—to show you what that looks like in person. Let me show you another biblical example of the kind of reaction we see in our text today as we close. Flip over to Matthew 26. We are fast-forwarding to the trial of Jesus (if we can call it that) before Caiaphas, the high priest. Now, I don't know what you know about the Jewish high priest, but he's kind of a big deal. Let me put things in perspective. In the Old Covenant there was a holiday called "Yom Kippur" ("the Day of Atonement"), it was the holiest day of the year because on that day an offering would be made for the atonement of the sins of the nation. And this was the only day of the entire year where someone was allowed to not only enter into the temple, but go beyond the curtain in the back, into what we call the "Holy of Holies." This is where the Ark of the Covenant was housed and where the presence of God was said to dwell. One person could go in there. Only on one day a year. And only for a brief period. That person was the high priest.

On this particular year, the high priest was Caiaphas. So, if you were a Jew, he was the guy who was considered the most important Jew that year. He was the guy who would represent you before God and offer up sacrifice for atonement. If there was one guy you would want to be legit and right before God, it was him. And if there was one guy you would assume would be legit and right before God, it was him. And, consequently, if there was one leader in Israel who you might expect to recognize the Messiah that God promised to send, it was him. And yet...Look at verse 57 and following...

"Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, 'This man said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days."'⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.'⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?' They answered, 'He deserves death.'⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?'" (Matthew 26:57-68)

The most important religious leader of the day is standing before Jesus, the promised Christ, face to face...and he did not recognize Him. Israel's temporary high priest standing before the people of God's Great High Priest, and he did not recognize Him. The one who one who served in the temple and priesthood, did not recognize the One to whom those institutions pointed. The Prophet above all prophets, he called a blasphemer. The King of all kings, he sentenced to death. The most religious guy in the room, did not recognize the God he claimed to serve.

What does that tell us? It tells us that your religion is not going to save you. Your knowledge of the things of God is not going to save you. Your position in some ecclesial body is not going to save you. Your being a good person in the eyes of all the people is not going to save you. If the most religious guy of the day could stare Jesus in the face and cast him aside, why would you think it would be any different for you if you trust in those things. Those things won't save you, friends. Christ alone can save you. And it is by His grace alone, through faith alone that you are saved (Eph 2:8-9). Not your works. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

I don't care how religious and knowledgeable you think you are when it comes to the things of God, you can still be a Pharisee or a Caiaphas. But the flip side of that—and the wonder of God's grace in our text this

morning—is that you could also have the past of Nineveh and the cynicism of the queen of Sheba and find the Lord giving you eyes to see and believe in Jesus. You can be a religious person and miss Jesus, but you can be the worst of sinners and find Him, call upon His name to save, and He will do it.

But don't take my word for it. Learn it from Jesus' word about Nineveh and the queen of Sheba. Learn it from the Apostle John, who makes the same point in the opening of the New Testament book by the same name. He writes,

“[Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:11-13)

Receive Him. Believe in His name. Trust Him to save. That's the way to be brought into the family of God. And I would love to discuss that with those who are feeling drawn to the Savior this morning. Come talk.

Let's pray...

¹ Notice also that the verse states that these men “answered” (*ἀπεκρίθησαν*) Jesus, which shows that this exchange is connected to the previous one in the wake of Jesus delivering the man from a demon (Matt 12:22-37). The chapter headings and divisions introduced by various English translations can inadvertently disguise this relationship.

² Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 147.

³ Additionally, “adultery” language is used to describe spiritual unfaithfulness in various places in the OT (e.g., Isa 1:21; 57:3-9; Jer 3:10; Ezek 23; Hos 1:2; 2:2, 5; 3:1). See Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 485.

⁴ Daniel M. Doriani, “Matthew,” ESVEC (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 200.

⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 485.

⁶ Doriani, “Matthew,” 202.

⁷ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew*, SAEC (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 397.

⁸ Sproul, *Matthew*, 400.

⁹ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew & Mark*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 296.

¹⁰ Sproul, *Matthew*, 398.

¹¹ Rodney Reeves, *Matthew*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 256-257.

¹² Sproul, *Matthew*, 399.

¹³ Doriani, “Matthew,” 201; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 325.

¹⁴ Craig Blomberg notes, “Luke 16:31 makes it plain that even this kind of sign will not convince the hard-hearted. Even the resurrection will not compel belief in the way the Jewish leaders desire. Hence, Mark 8:12 can phrase Jesus' reply simply as, ‘No sign will be given’” (*Matthew*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992], 206). Morris remarks, “Signs are granted to faith, so how can the faithless ever see them?” (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, 325).

¹⁵ “We might have expected the masculine ‘someone greater,’ but the neuter points to God's whole work in Jesus, the sending of his Son, the decisive provision for the salvation of repentant sinners, the bringing in of the kingdom. All this represents something far greater than the coming of a Jewish prophet to the ancient city of Nineveh. We should notice two contrasts: the Ninevites repented, and the people of Jesus' day did not; and again, the Ninevites were confronted with Jonah, these Jews with someone far greater.” Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 327.

¹⁶ Doriani notes, “From one angle, the ‘queen of the South,’ the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–10), is the reverse of Nineveh: the Ninevites received Jonah, but she pursued Solomon on a long, arduous journey. She went to hear a man with great wisdom, but Jesus has greater wisdom, yet Israel's leaders spurn him” (“Matthew,” 201). Morris makes a similar point: “[I]t is generally agreed that Sheba was in the region we now call Yemen, and with conditions of travel in King Solomon's day that meant a long and difficult journey. In some ways she forms a more impressive example than the Ninevites, for they responded to a man who came and preached to them on their own home turf, whereas she embarked on a lengthy journey to hear Solomon. But she made it in order to hear the wisdom she regarded as outstanding. Yet the men of Jesus' day refused to be impressed with the presence of the greatest of all” (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, 327).

¹⁷ Doriani, “Matthew,” 203.