

THE SIGN OF JONAH
AND THE RESURRECTION OF
CHRIST

- According to the Bible, Christ rose from the dead «**in accordance with the scriptures**» (1 Corinthians 15: 4).
- «Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?» And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them **in all the Scriptures** the things concerning Himself.» (Luke 24:26-27).
- «And on the third day He rose again, **according to the Scriptures**» (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed).

What are the Old Testament prophecies of the Lord's Resurrection?

A sometimes used example of a rather implicit Old Testament prophecy of the Resurrection of Christ is a passage from Hosea 6:1-2:

“Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; **On the third day He will raise us up**”.

However, it seems to refer to the resurrection of the people of Israel, using the image of coming back to life to describe the regathering of the twelve tribes (see Hosea 5– 6).

In the Gospels, there is **only one passage from Jewish Scripture** that the Lord cites as a direct prophecy of His Resurrection on the third day: **the so-called sign of Jonah** (Matthew 12: 38-41; Luke 11: 29-32).

The Sign of Jonah in the Gospel of Matthew

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and **no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.** For 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. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; **and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.**’ (Matthew 12:38-41)

The prayer of Jonah

“I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; **out of the belly of Sheol** I cried and thou didst hear my voice. The waters closed in over me, the deep was round about me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever; yet **you brought my life from the Pit**, O Lord my God. When **my soul fainted within me**, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.” And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “**Arise**, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. (Jonah 1: 17– 3: 3)

Was Jonah dead or alive? Three key points in Jonah 1:17– 3:3.

- Jonah cries out to God from “the belly of Sheol” and “the Pit”. These are standard Old Testament terms that refer to realm of the dead (Psalm 139: 7-8; Job 17: 13-16; 33: 22-30).
- When Jonah says that his “soul” (Hebrew נַפְשׁ/nephesh) fainted within him, this is another way of saying that he died. In other words, Jonah’s prayer is the last gasp of a dying man.
- God’s first word to Jonah is: “Arise” (Hebrew קוּם/qûm). This is the same Semitic word that Christ uses when He raises Jairus’s daughter from the dead and says to her: “Talitha cumi,” meaning “Little girl, I say to you, arise” (Mark 5: 41).

Who are the people of Nineveh?

- Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, one of Israel's fiercest pagan enemies (see 2 Kings 15-17; Tobit 13).
- In response to the preaching of Jonah after his rescue, “the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them” (Jonah 3: 5). Even the pagan king of Nineveh is said to have “covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes” before commanding his entire people to “cry mightily to God” (Jonah 3: 6-8).
- Thus, the real miracle in the book of Jonah is the repentance— one might even say the “conversion”— of the Gentiles.

So what is the Sign of Jonah? Is it the miraculous rescue of Jonah or the miraculous repentance of the Gentiles? Both!

A comparison of the Sign of Jonah and the Resurrection of Christ.

The Sign of Jonah	The Resurrection of Christ
1. Death and resurrection after three days in Sheol.	1. Death and Resurrection after three days in the tomb.
2. Repentance of the Ninevites in response to his preaching.	2. Repentance of the Gentiles in response to His preaching.

According to the Lord, it is not just His Resurrection from the dead that will be a reason for believing in Him. It is also the **inexplicable conversion of the pagan nations of the world—the Gentiles.**

Patristic references

The early Church Fathers constantly pointed to the pagan world around converting, repenting and beginning to worship the God of the Jews.

- **St. Ambrose of Milan** (IV century) wrote:

“The mystery of the Church is clearly expressed [in Jesus’s words about the sign of Jonah]. Her flocks stretch from the boundaries of the whole world. They stretch to Nineveh through penitence.... The mystery is now fulfilled in truth”. (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, 7.96).

Eusebius of Caesarea (+339).

- Behold how today, yes, in our own times, our eyes see not only Egyptians, but every race of men who used to be idolaters... released from the errors of polytheism and the demons, and calling on the God of the prophets!... ***Yes, in our own time the knowledge of the Omnipotent God shines forth and sets a seal of certainty on the forecasts of the prophets. You see this actually going on, you no longer only expect to hear of it, and if you ask the moment when the change began, for all your inquiry you will receive no other answer but the moment of the appearance of the Savior...*** And who would not be struck by the extraordinary change— that men who for ages have paid divine honor to wood and stone and demons, wild beasts that feed on human flesh, poisonous reptiles, animals of every kinds, repulsive monsters, fire and earth, and the lifeless elements of the universe should after our Savior's coming pray to the Most High God, Creator of Heaven and earth, the actual Lord of the prophets, and the God of Abraham and his forefathers? (*The Proof of the Gospel*, 1.6.20– 21)

Sources and some additional reading:

- **Pitre, Brant.** *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (2016): 185-191, Kindle Edition.
- **Landes, George M.,** *The 'Three Days and Three Nights' Motif in Jonah 2: 1, Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 246– 50.
- **Luz, Ulrich,** *Matthew 1-7 (Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible)* (2007): 2: 217.

The Prophet
Jonah



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