

# Seeking A Sign From Heaven?

Jesus has been assaulted by the religious leaders on three occasions with accusations of casting out demons. The last accusation occurred in the Fall of A.D. 32 (Luke 11:14-16). On the last occasion the religious leaders also asked for a sign. In response, Jesus answered the first accusation. We discovered that Jesus gave them the longest reply yet in response to their horrible accusations. In the last two studies, Jesus responded to their accusation by telling them that He was superior in strength to the demonic forces in the world. The proof that He was superior was that when the religious leaders' sons cast a demon out of someone, the demon returned. Sometimes they returned with more demons. But that was not true when Jesus cast out demons. When Christ cast out a demon, the demon did not return. It was proof that Jesus was superior. In this study Jesus replies now to their request for a sign. His answer is recorded in Luke 11:29-36. We will discover that Jesus reaches back to Old Testament examples and then told them to watch for the sign that is within you!

**WE WANT A SIGN.** In Luke 11:29 we are told that the crowds were increasing in size. That is, the controversy between the religious leaders and Jesus was so interesting that people stopped to listen and stayed. Initially, the crowd heard the slanderous statement in Luke 11:15 that Jesus' ability to cast out demons was by demonic power. They also heard Jesus' reply to that false accusation. Having finished His reply to that accusation in verses 17-28, Jesus now replies to their request that He perform a sign in verses 29-36. The request to perform a sign occurred in Luke 11:16.

Requests for signs had occurred before in the Old Testament. Do you remember Gideon? He wanted to know if God would use him to deliver the nation of Israel from the Midianites. Therefore, he asked God for a sign. He wanted to know if God would be with him. He knew that if God was not with him, then the battle would be a disaster. Consequently, he asked God for two signs. The

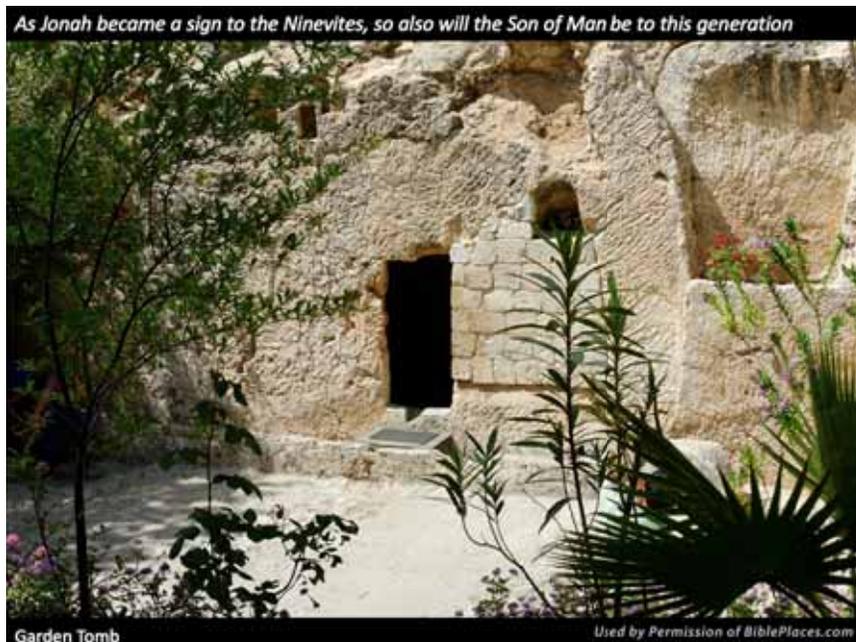
first sign was that he would place dry fleece on the ground. He asked that the fleece would be wet in the morning if God would use him to defeat the Midianites (Judges 6:36-37). In the morning, the fleece was wet with dew (Judges 6:38). Then Gideon asked for a second sign. He asked that the fleece would be dry in the morning and the ground would be wet with dew just as it was the first time. In the morning,

the fleece was dry and the ground was wet with dew. Both times God answered his request for a sign (Judges 6:39-40).

Exodus 33:14-16 tells us that Moses asked for a sign also. He wanted to know if he and the nation of Israel had found favor with God. Therefore, Moses asked that God would go with them into the Promised

Land. That was Moses' sign. God replied that He would go with them. Scripture reports that God continued to go with the Israelites to the Promised Land.

God responded to other requests for signs. For example,



God gave Ahaz a sign about a child that would be virgin born in Isaiah 7:14 (Isaiah 7:10-14). God gave Hezekiah a sign that he would be healed. The sign was that the sun dial would move back 10 steps (2 Kings 20:8-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24). God gave a sign to the priest Eli (1 Samuel 2:34) that his sons would die on the same day because Eli had failed to discipline his boys (1 Samuel 2:29). God has also given signs to us through the prophets. These signs are called prophesies (1 Peter 1:10-12). The Urim and Thummim were used in some way to determine God's will (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). Also, one could cast lots to determine God's will according to Proverbs 16:33.

**The lot is cast into the lap,**

**But its every decision is from the Lord.**

**Proverbs 16:33 (NASB)**

During Jesus' ministry, He voluntarily gave the people signs that revealed He was God (John 20:30-31). They were miracles as well as signs and wonders. The first occurred at the wedding in Cana of Galilee when He turned water into wine (John 2:11). His second miracle or sign occurred in John 4:54 when He healed a royal official's son. Jesus performed others signs (John 5:8-13; 6:11-14, 16-25; 9:1-12; 12:18). Earlier in Jesus' ministry, the religious leaders had asked Him for a sign (John 2:18-19; 6:30) and Jesus gave them a sign when He said,

**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. John 2:19 (NASB)**

But the religious leader's request for a sign was not a polite request. They were demanding that He give a sign.

**Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven. Luke 11:16 (NASB)**

The Greek that is translated as demanding is *zeteo*. *Zeteo* normally means "to seek". But in this case the verb is in the imperfect tense which implies that they were repeatedly asking for a sign. They were demanding a sign!

**A SIGN FROM HEAVEN IS REJECTED.** The key question is why did they demand a sign? Did they want to know if Jesus' claims about His identity and teachings were true? Or, were they only testing Him and expecting Him to fail in His attempt resulting in embarrassment and being discredited? Jesus' response reveals that they were not sincere seekers of truth. Notice what Jesus said.

**As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. Luke 11:29 (NASB)**

The Greek word for increasing is *epathroizo* and it means "to assemble in addition." The word is also a present passive participle which means that more people were constantly coming to hear Christ. One wonders how large the crowd was when Jesus said these words. This must have been an exciting moment for the crowd and a tense one for the religious leaders.

Notice that Jesus' statement is potent. He said, "This generation is a wicked generation." The Greek word for generation is *genea* and it can mean any of the following: "family, race, offspring, age or clan." English words often have multiple meanings such as the word "bill". The word "bill" can refer to the bill of a cap, bill of a duck or a dollar bill, for example. It depends upon the context which sense of the word *Genea* is the correct meaning. For example, the word could refer to the Jewish race such as in Matthew 24:34-36. The word can also mean "kind" as in Luke 16:8 in the New American Standard Bible (NASB). It could mean "family." Every family is more than just the immediate nucleus. It also includes one's parents, siblings and future children. It includes the family members on both sides as well as one's parents and grandchildren. But in this context Jesus uses the word to refer to the Jews who were alive at the time Jesus was speaking.

The Greek word for "wicked" is *poneros*. It refers to one who is morally corrupt and evil. If we put all of these words together, we discover that Jesus told them that they

had an extremely serious problem. They wanted a sign out of heaven. Notice that they wanted a sign out of heaven. It is doubtful that a solar eclipse or a special light show in the sky would have satisfied them. Would they have been impressed if Jesus had rearranged the constellations? How about changing the color of the sun into half green and half purple? Would they have been impressed had Jesus created another sun or another moon? More than likely, just as some people today, they would have created some “logical” excuse why Jesus did not really perform the wonder or sign. Most likely they would have claimed a “natural phenomena” had occurred.

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DO NOT SEEK SIGNS.** There are some today who always seek a sign or a miracle. They are always wanting to attend some special meeting or wonderful conference that promises some spectacular healing miracle or sign in order to be convinced that God is real or Christ is real. They have doubts and so they are looking for proof or looking to be convinced once again. They are always looking for the sensational. Such Christians are weak in faith because they depend upon miracles.

Every Christian should remember the following words spoken by Jesus,

*Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:29-31 (NASB)*

Notice that Thomas had wanted to place his fingers into Jesus’ wounds in order to believe in Him. That was Thomas’ sign - fingers in Jesus’ wounds. In response, Jesus said, “Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” That is, blessed are those who do not depend upon miracles, signs and wonders, and who do not need to put their fingers in the wounds on Jesus’ side and hands in order to believe or be reassured. Then the Holy Spirit tells us God has given us signs because we need them! But we should not need signs

repeatedly. Thomas should have remembered Jesus’ prophecies about His resurrection. He should have already believed in Christ. The message is that a spiritually mature Christian does not need signs!

But that does not describe this “wicked generation.” This generation is “wicked.” The religious leaders were not Christians and they were not seriously looking for proof that Jesus is God, the Messiah, the Savior or their King. They want Him to fail and to be discredited. Therefore, Jesus tells them that they will not be given a sign from heaven. Instead the only sign that they will receive will be the sign of Jonah.

**BUT THE SIGN OF JONAH.** Consequently, Jesus rejected their request for a sign from heaven.

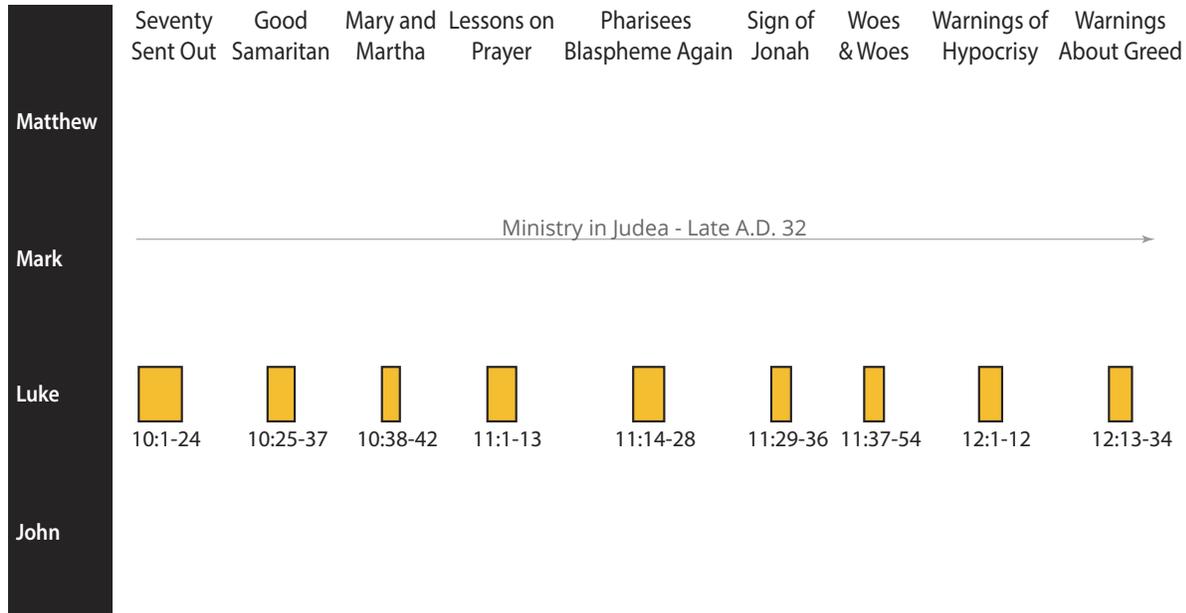
*... it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. Luke 11:29 (NASB)*

Yet, He does promise them a sign. It is the sign of Jonah. What is the sign of Jonah? The answer is found in the book of Jonah. Jonah is the prophet who did not want to obey God. Therefore, he tried to run away from God. Silly man! He boarded a boat headed for Tarshish. He thought he had escaped, but God caused a tremendous storm on the sea. The sailors on the boat had never experienced a storm like this one. Consequently, Jonah 1:5 says that they became fearful and cried out to their gods. It is amazing that God did not destroy the ship due to Jonah’s sin. Instead, God created a storm that was significant enough to get their attention and yet, not destroy the ship or the sailors. Eventually, he was thrown overboard because Jonah told the sailors that he was the reason for the storm. They eventually tossed him overboard. Initially, they tried to avoid throwing him overboard, but then God made the storm worse and the sailors finally realized that Jonah’s suggestion was the best course of action (Jonah 1:10-12). It is amazing that Jonah did not jump into the sea on his own. Why did he make the sailors toss him? Jonah lacked integrity! But eventually he was tossed overboard and swallowed by a “great sea monster.”

**JONAH DIED INSIDE THE GREAT FISH.** Jonah 2 describes Jonah’s prayer while he was inside this great sea animal. Scripture tells us that seaweed was wrapped around

# Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Judea - Late A.D. 32



his neck and the water engulfed him while he was inside the sea animal (Jonah 2:3-5). In verses 6-7 Jonah died. There are two reasons to believe that he died in the stomach of that great sea monster. First, Jonah describes his death with these words,

6. I descended to the roots of the mountains.  
 The earth with its bars was around me forever,  
 But You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.  
 7. While I was fainting away,  
 I remembered the Lord,  
 And my prayer came to You,  
 Into Your holy temple.  
 Jonah 2:6-7 (NASB)

In verse 6 Jonah tells us that God brought his life up from the pit. That is, God resurrected Jonah. A pit usually refers to a hole in the ground. However, in the Old Testament the word pit sometimes refers to the grave or Sheol (Job 33:18; Psalm 30:3, 9; Proverbs 1:12). Sometimes the word pit refers to the ultimate destiny of the spirits of the wicked (Job

33:22, 24, 28, 30; Psalm 28:1; 30:9; 55:23; Proverbs 1:12; Isaiah 14:15). Therefore verse 6 says that Jonah died in the stomach of this great sea monster and then God brought him back to life. In verse 7 Jonah looks back to verse 6 He tells us that while he was fainting away, he prayed and God heard him. As a result God resurrected Jonah.

**JONAH WAS DEAD FOR THREE DAYS & NIGHTS.** The second reason we should believe that Jonah died in this great fish is that Jesus states in Matthew 12:40 that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, He will be too!

... for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:40 (NASB)

The parallel strongly implies that Jonah was dead for three days and nights.

It should be noted that the phrase three days and three nights does not mean three twenty-four hour days or a full 72 hour period of time. The phrase “three days and three

nights” was a Jewish custom that referred to any part of three days. For example, some workman might say that he will start a certain task or job tomorrow and he will complete the task in three days. Now he does not mean that he will start at 6:00 AM in the morning and complete the task 72 hours later at 6:00 AM, for a full 72 hours. He means that he will start the task sometime tomorrow and complete the task sometime during the third calendar day.

Esther 4:16 and 5:1 illustrate that this custom was also practiced by the Jews. In Esther 4:16 we are told that Queen Esther commanded all the Jews in Persia to not eat or drink for three days or three nights before she goes in to visit the king. Her phrase is abbreviated as “three days, night or day.”

*Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16 (NASB)*

Then two verses later we are told that the Queen visited the king on the third day.

*Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace in front of the king’s rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. Esther 5:1 (NASB)*

Clearly, she did not give the command at 12 midnight on the first day and then visit the king at 12 midnight on the third day in order to achieve 72 hours. Instead, she gave the command during the first day and visited the king during the third day. The first and third days were partial days, yet are recorded as three days, night or day.

Consequently, when Jesus said that Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, we should not stretch the phrase to mean a literal 72 hours. That was not the Jewish custom and it is not our custom either.

**JONAH WAS A SIGN.** Then Jesus told the crowd that He would be a sign to them just as Jonah was a sign to the

Ninevites.

*For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. Luke 11:30 (NASB)*

How was a Jonah a sign? First, it is important to note that there are documented accounts of people almost or actually being swallowed by fish. Here is one modern day account.

He was in about 30ft of water off Cape Howe, a wild stretch of coastline between New South Wales and Victoria. One minute he was prizing abalone off the rocks with a chisel, the next he found his head, torso and one arm enclosed by the killer shark’s razor sharp teeth.

“I’ve never felt fear in my life like what I felt in the jaws of that white pointer,” Mr. Nerhus said. “I went straight into its mouth, front onwards. Half my body was in its throat. It was like being in a dark cave.”

He felt the shark’s teeth “crunching” into the lead weight vest he was wearing as the creature shook him from side to side in an attempt to “cut off the biggest piece of meat.” The force of the bite crushed his diving mask, broke his nose and forced his air tube, or regulator, out of his mouth.

Despite his terror he had the presence of mind to use his free arm to feel along the side of the shark’s head and locate its eye, which he started stabbing as hard as possible with his abalone chisel.

He estimated that he spent about two minutes inside the shark’s mouth without his air supply. Marine biologists said the shark had probably mistaken the diver for a seal and let go of him as soon as he started putting up a fight.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most significant series of accounts is recorded in the 1927 Princeton Theological Review.

There have been many cases where whales in the fury of their

1. “Man ‘swallowed’ by great white says it was like being trapped in a cave” The Telegraph ([www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1540443/Man-swallowed-by-great-white-says-it-was-like-being-trapped-in-a-cave.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1540443/Man-swallowed-by-great-white-says-it-was-like-being-trapped-in-a-cave.html)).

dying agony have swallowed human beings; but this is the first modern case in which the victim has come forth safe and sound.<sup>2</sup>

Ambrose Wilson gives numerous accounts of men swallowed by a great fish. But how was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites? Imagine what Jonah looked like after he was spit up onto the seashore. The stomach acids in this super-sized fish would have bleached Jonah's skin and clothes. Imagine how the people would have reacted when they saw him crawling off the seashore. The people would have known something strange had happened to this prophet. He was also a sign when he warned them to repent or be destroyed. His bleached skin and clothes and his survival from the fish would have authenticated his message of pending doom to the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4). We can be confident that they believed what Jonah said because the people of Nineveh repented (Jonah 3:5-9). In response, God spared them (Jonah 3:10).

*As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. Luke 11:31 (NASB)*

Jonah was a sign! Jesus was not trying to educate the crowd about Jonah. The Jewish crowd would have already known about Jonah. Jonah was a sign because of his discoloration and his message to the Ninevites. Jesus would be a sign also.

**QUEEN OF THE SOUTH WILL CONDEMN THEM.** After

2. Ambrose John Wilson. The Sign of the Prophet Jonah and its Modern Confirmations. The Princeton Theological Review, 1927.

telling the religious leaders that they will be given the sign of Jonah, He tells them that they will be condemned at the judgment by the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh. First, He refers to the Queen of the South who will condemn the Jewish leaders at the judgment.

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Luke 11:31 (NASB)*

The name of the Queen of the South is not mentioned. 1

Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 do not reveal her name either. What is significant is that Jesus referred to a woman. R. C. H. Lenski makes the following comment about this woman.

Note the points: a benighted Gentile and a woman at that - in a far distant land - with only more or less uncertain reports

to inform her - undertakes a journey of such proportions - to hear the wisdom of one who is a type, though only a type, of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

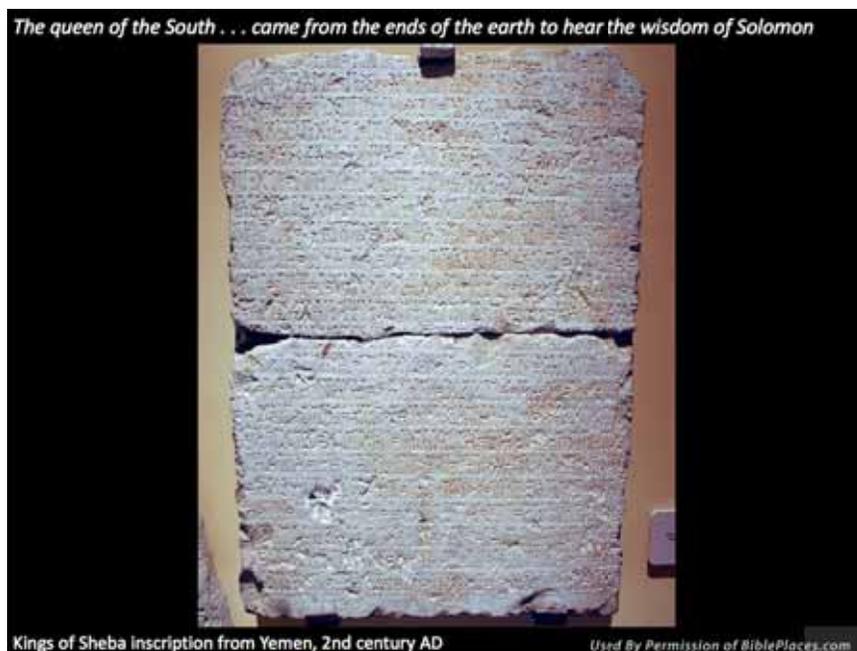
Since the ancient Jews had a low opinion of women,<sup>4,5</sup> Jesus' comment that a woman would condemn them would have been shocking and insulting.

The phrase "from the ends of the earth" refers to the fact

3. R. C. H. Lenski. Luke. Commentary on the new Testament. Hendrickson Publishers. 1961. p. 648.

4. Jacob Neusner. Qiddushin. The Mishnah. Yale University Press. 1988. 1:1B. p. 487.

5. Genesis Rabbah 17:8; 18:2. Sefaria (www.sefaria.org/Bereishit\_Rabbah.18.2?lang=bi)



that she had traveled from a long distance. Ancient records and archaeological discoveries confirm that modern day Yemen was once known as Sheba. The Queen of Sheba would not have had an automobile to take her to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon nor would she have been able to travel by an airline. The trip would have seemed like she had come from the ends of the earth. I Kings 10:2-3 implies that she came to seek counsel. 2 Chronicles 9:6 reveals that she visited the king because she had heard about his great wisdom. That is, she highly respected King Solomon.

After Jesus masterfully explains that this woman greatly respected King Solomon, He reveals that the Jews should have even more highly respected Him, because “something greater than Solomon is here.” He referred to himself. Consequently, at the time of judgment she will stand up and condemn the men of that generation because they rejected Jesus.

Notice that Jesus reveals that at the final judgment of non-Christians, which is the Great White throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), people will be able to confront one another about their sins. Jesus seems to imply that the Queen of Sheba may in fact be one of His godly ones. If so, then that may imply the Old Testament saints and Christians will participate in the judgment, for He says that the queen will condemn them. If so, that will make the final judgment an extremely embarrassing and humiliating event. After the judgment, non-Christians will be assigned to the

Lake of Fire.

**MEN OF NINEVEH WILL CONDEMN THEM.** Now stop and think about the situation in which Jesus is speaking. The crowd is large and the religious leaders are listening to Jesus tell them that because they have rejected Him, a woman will condemn them. Now the men of the entire city of Nineveh will condemn them at the judgment too!

*The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Luke 11:32 (NASB)*



Jesus’ statement is almost identical to His statement about the Queen of Sheba, except this time He adds that they repented at the preaching of Jonah. The message is that the generation of Jesus’ time should have repented

because of Jesus’ preaching. The Queen of Sheba and men of Nineveh will both condemn them.

**THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD RADIATES LIGHT.** In verses 33-36 Jesus gave the religious leaders and the crowd two parables and indirectly they are given to us too! The first parable occurs in verse 33.

*No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. Luke 11:33 (NASB)*

The lamp contains oil and had a wick that was lit. Once lit, the lamp gave forth light. Jesus' point is that once lit, no one then hides the lamp but leaves it in a place where all can benefit from the light. Earlier in John 8:12 Jesus said, "I Am the Light of the World." His words were rays of light - the Word of God.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." John 8:12 (NASB)

Jesus came into the world and He radiated truth - the Word of God. Why would He hide Himself? Why would God the Father hide Him?

**CLEAR EYES SEE THE LIGHT.** The second parable is about eyes that can see or not see the Light.

The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. Luke 11:34-35 (NASB)

Having given us the first parable, we understand that the lamp was not hidden but was giving forth light. In this second parable Jesus symbolically says that the eye is like a lamp to one's body. When one's eye is clear, they can see clearly; but if the eye is bad, then the person cannot see. The Greek word for "bad" is *poneros*. It can also mean "diseased or evil".

Anyone who has had cataracts on their eyes can identify with this parable very easily. A cataract is a growth on one's

eye that progressively limits the amount of light that enters the eye and consequently the person cannot see very well. Modern medicine has made it possible to replace the cataract with a clear lens which allows more light to enter the body. Once the surgery is performed, the patient has significant improvement in their eyesight. Colors are more vivid and they can see distant objects more clearly.

But Jesus is not trying to give a medical explanation. He is making a spiritual application. Since *poneros* can also mean evil, He seems to be making a play on words. Evil people do not have spiritual eyes and as a result they do not understand spiritual truth. Then Jesus concludes by connecting the first

and second parables together.

If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays. Luke 11:36 (NASB)

One who is spiritual understands spiritual truth. Such a one will understand the Light of Truth

that is given by the Light of the World that is shining before them!

**CONCLUSION.** Jesus, the Light of the World, was in their midst and shining brightly. He boldly presented truth and they did not understand because their spiritual eyes were diseased with sin. They rejected Him and mockingly demanded some extraordinary sign from heaven. They illustrate unbelief that is looking for reasons to reject Jesus. They did not really want to see a sign. Jesus said that a wicked nation seeks a sign. But even if the spiritually blind see the sign, they will not understand because their spiritual eyes are diseased. Even though Jesus promised them the sign of



Jonah, the gospels and historical records reveal they did not “see” or understand the sign. Only a few did. They saw but they did not see or understand.

Those who are Christians will understand what Jesus was teaching. Do you understand? If you have believed in Christ then you are spiritually alive (John 3:16), and your

eyes should see clearly. A woman once told me that she had trouble understanding the truths of the Bible. But once she became a Christian, she could understand the Bible. This is an important test that you can apply to yourself to determine if you are a Christian. That is, do you understand the Bible? Do you understand what Jesus is teaching?