

## WHY DID YOU INCLINE TO SEEK A MIRACLE?

Matthew 12:38-50

Key Verse: 12:39

"He answered, `A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'"

In the last passage we learned about Jesus' broken shepherd heart toward a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. In fact, Jesus had been too harassed to pay attention to this poor creature. But he healed this demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. And Jesus astonished people because of his messianic compassion and divine power. Then the Pharisees, considered the authorities by the people, condemned Jesus by chiding, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons" (12:24). They were malicious and too vicious toward the messianic ministry of healing a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. What did Jesus do? Jesus was greatly offended by the Pharisees. But he explained that the chief demon's power is not the power to save people or give life, but to make people useless and demonic. Therefore, Jesus was not driving out demons by the power of the chief demon; he was driving out demons by the Spirit of God so that people might see the [kingdom of God](#).

Jesus also told them that those who saw and understood the obvious work of God, but denied the work of the Holy Spirit, would not be forgiven. All such people will have to give account for their act of suppressing the truth and denying the work of the Holy Spirit. Their punishment will come upon them both while they are on the earth, and in the age to come. There are many miserable people. Most of them are miserable not because they have no money, but because they speak against the Holy Spirit and the messianic work in order to justify their sinful lives. In today's passage we learn why the Jews were so inclined to seek signs. We also learn what kind of sign we, as Bible-believing Christians, must seek. First, sign-seeking Jews (38). Look at verse 38. "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.'" In this short verse we learn that the Jews sought a sign even after offending Jesus in the last passage. There must be an obvious reason for this.

When we trace their history, we can clearly see why they were inclined to seek signs. Jewish people were also called Hebrew people. Hebrew people were the ancestors of the Israelites. The Israelites were called Jews. From the beginning of their history to the end, they had been downtrodden people. They underwent 430 years of slavery in the Egyptian Empire. They also received wilderness [training](#) for 40 years when, because of their unbelief, they could not enter the promised land where milk and honey were flowing. They were people chosen by God. But they were rebellious, traditional and self-righteous. Now, even though they were under the Roman Empire, they thought they were much better and richer than the Romans. They had been slaves four times: first to Egypt, next to Babylonia, then to Greece, and now they were under the yoke of the Roman Empire. Still, they denied that they had ever been slaves to any country (Jn 8:33). In a sense they were a great people.

Also, they were very stubborn and obstinate people. When we review world history, we can see that God gave them the book of the Law, beginning with [the Ten Commandments](#) and many kinds of literature, poems and prophecies, and these works formed their culture. In the midst of suffering they always longed for the coming of the Messiah who would destroy all the enemy nations. And they wished that the Messiah would establish an earthly messianic kingdom to rule all peoples and all nations of the world and make Zion the capital city of the world. Their miracle-seeking mentality came from their longing for the Messiah's final victory. However, God's purpose in sending the Messiah was not to make Israel the only world power nation, but to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." When the Jews rejected God's mission, their historical background made them miracle-seeking, and at the same time, it produced Hebraism, one of the streams of culture in world history.

As we have studied, Hebraism emphasizes literature, miracles and the spiritual world. There is another stream of culture, that is, Hellenism, which is rooted in Greek philosophy. Hebrew people started their thinking about people and the world from God. But Greek people started their thinking about people and the world from human reason; we call it Hellenism. Hellenism is good and realistic. Their ancestor Socrates indoctrinated people to have high moral standards. This is the reason he was imprisoned. He died saying, "Pay back my neighbor for a hen that I ate." Until the Industrial Revolution, Hebraism dominated the world. After the Industrial Revolution, Hellenism began to dominate the world. Today, even in America, teachers cannot teach Creation faith in the classroom, but they encourage the study of evolution diligently. Hellenist thought is based on logic, mathematics and moral code. But they had a problem. Their problem was serious: they were not confident about epistemology, the origin of knowledge. Without true knowledge they still had to develop their thinking. So they were confused. Then they began to think about more delicate things. As a result, they produced mountains of myths about women's beauty, the nose of Cleopatra, and so on. Still, Socrates' motto, "Know Thyself" is the Bible of Hellenism.

When we carefully study world history, Hebraism and Hellenism were always streaming as the undercurrents of human culture. Now America is ruled by the current of humanism, with the past experience of Hebraism. As a result, people are totally confused and helpless. Paul, the greatest philosopher of East and West, summarized in 1 Corinthians 1:22: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom..." Here, 'miraculous signs' are related to spiritual realities, and wisdom is limited to human knowledge. That's the difference between Hebraism and Hellenism. So far we thought about why the Jews liked miracles so much.

Second, the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (39-41). Jesus answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!" (39a) This is a rebuke to the Pharisees. Here, wicked people are lazy people. They didn't do anything, but only wished that the Messiah would come and establish an earthly messianic kingdom and make them rulers of all peoples of all

nations. They are similar to many factory boys. One factory boy, who later became a night shift truck driver, graduated from high school as a valedictorian. He became proud. He thought it was not necessary to go to college and that he could fix up the world, be a multi-billionaire and have a foxy wife and a nice house in the suburbs. But it did not work as he had hallucinated. This person is wicked because of his empty pride. There are many sign-seeking people who are wicked, living in the stream of Hellenism. In the ivory towers of this nation, the halls of learning, white Americans have become a minority. Most people in the best academic programs of schools throughout the country are foreigners; very few Americans are in these ivory towers. So one American who entered a Ph.D. program gets a higher stipend as a minority. Those who have big dreams but do not work hard and study hard are miracle-seeking people and wicked people. They are also adulterous people. Look at verse 39. "He answered, `A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!'" Why are miracle-seeking people adulterous people? This is a rebuke to the Pharisees. They were supposed to be servants of God as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But they abandoned their mission and became miracle-seeking. Miracle-seeking people do not have life direction. Miracle-seeking people do not have purpose of life. Miracle-seeking people do not have faith to live for the glory of God. As a result, though they may attend some school or do something, they are always groping in the darkness without any clear purpose of life or glorious mission. Therefore, miracle-seeking people are directionless people; they are similar to adulterous people who have no moral standard.

When Jesus thought about the Pharisees, his heart was broken. But he gave the best explanation to help them stop miracle-seeking and know the purpose of God. Jesus told them the story of the prophet Jonah from the Old Testament. Jonah was a very rebellious prophet. God asked him to go to the right; he went to the left God wanted him to go to Nineveh, but Jonah wanted to go to Tarshish. Jonah, in his self-righteousness, thought the people of Nineveh, one of the powerful cities of the time, should perish. But God wanted to save the people of Nineveh. Yet his servant Jonah thought Nineveh was too big a city, too full of proud people and that gospel preaching would not be accepted. So he bought a boat ticket to Tarshish. On the way the sea was very rough, and finally the sailors found that the turbulence of the sea was caused by Jonah's rebellion against God's mission. So the sailors could not but throw him into the sea. Then the sea became calm. Jonah was in deep regret and still rebellious. But he asked God's mercy to save him. Then God sent a whale, and it swallowed him up. So he was in the belly of a whale. There he wrote many poems and spent time in prayer. God, out of great mercy, made the whale vomit him out on dry land near Nineveh. Jonah was just like the Pharisees and he is just like handsome and able young men of our time.

Look at verse 40. The last part of this verse is very meaningful. "...so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Relating to Jonah's three days in the belly of a whale, Jesus explained that the Son of Man would be three days in the heart of the earth. This part moves our hearts. The Pharisees were so self-righteous and miracle-seeking and wicked and adulterous. But Jesus wanted them to come to him. Jesus wanted to explain to them the meaning of his death on the cross. Jesus wanted to explain why he had to be

crucified and shed much blood and water when a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear. Jesus must have been very lonely when he mentioned his death on the cross, separation from God and burial in the earth for three days, as Jonah was in the whale's belly for three days. The Pharisees did not deserve to hear this gracious word of Jesus. But Jesus told them anyway.

Jesus told the story of Jonah so that they might be saved from judgment. Look at verse 41. "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here." The greater one is Jesus Christ, the Messiah for whom they had waited so long. The Messiah was right there. But because of their miracle-seeking desire they could not see him. The kingdom of God was right there. But they were living in hell. Jesus wanted to save them from eternal condemnation in hell. Jesus told them to repent.

Third, the Queen of the South (42). The Queen of the South is mentioned in connection with Solomon. She was a most beautiful woman and a powerful woman. Above all, she was a woman of wisdom. When she heard about King Solomon's wisdom, she came to Solomon with many gifts. But her motive in coming to Solomon was to have a contest in human wisdom with him. She didn't want to be second to King Solomon in human wisdom. So she looked at everything Solomon had made, and talked with him for several days. She found that King Solomon was wiser than herself. Then she bowed down to King Solomon and went back to her own kingdom. She said, "Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard" (1Ki 10:7). It was the expression of her deep respect for the wisdom of Solomon and the Lord his God. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "...and now one greater than Solomon is here." Jesus really wanted the Pharisees to recognize God's wisdom in Jesus and accept him as the Messiah and enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus understood the Pharisees so deeply. In a sense, they were better than the Gentile people in terms of morality. But they did not know the activities of Satan. So Jesus told them a story. Allegorically speaking, this tells of a highly moral man's tragedy. There was a man who had a high moral standard. A demon came into him, but the demon had no joy to be in his soul because he was like a pool full of too clean water in which no fish can find any food. So the demon left him and wandered around. But the demon could not find a wicked man for a rental house. So he recruited seven more demons and decided to go back to the clean-water man. Then the man became filthy because of eight demons' occupation. This story is not only for the Pharisees, but for all self-righteous people.

Fourth, Jesus' mother and brothers (46-50). While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you" (46-47). It is quite sure that they were in line to wait their turn to talk to Jesus. So someone came and notified Jesus that they were in line, like Communist commodity buyers at a shop. Then Jesus pointed to his disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (49-50). It sounds very painful for Jesus' mother and brothers. But in the long run this turns

out to be true. Let's pray that all of us may do the will of God and be Jesus' family members.

Today we studied miracle-seeking peoples' tragedy. Let's not be miracle-seeking, and as a result, wicked and adulterous. Let's seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Then God will make us great and wealthy.