

The Sign of Jonah: Pointing to Christ's Death

When certain scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “Master, we would see a sign from thee,” He responded, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matt. 12:38–39). Jesus then taught the scribes and Pharisees valuable lessons. Jesus Christ’s comparison to Jonah has three significant aspects:

1. Perhaps that evil generation was seeking an immediate sign, such as healing the sick or the blind, but Jesus offered them the greatest sign of all, one that points to His death and subsequent Resurrection.³³

2. Jesus compared Jonah’s three days and three nights in the whale to the three days and nights that He, Jesus, would spend in the abode of the spirits of the dead. The sign of the prophet Jonah refers to Jesus’s death, burial, and Resurrection.

3. When Jesus stated “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here,” He was comparing Himself to Jonah. Indeed, Jesus is greater than Jonah.

Jesus informed His audience that the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but Jesus’s audience had failed to repent at His teaching, even though He was greater than Jonah.

There are other ways in which Jonah served as a type of Jesus Christ. One outstanding example is when Jonah was sleeping on the ship during the raging storm. The ship’s captain came to Him and said, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:6). This parallels the occurrence when Jesus slept in the ship during a great storm and others awoke Him and said, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38–39). In the first instance, Jonah’s being cast into the sea was the cause of the storm’s ceasing, and in the second, Jesus caused the storm to cease.

Jonah and Ninevah	Theme	Matthew 12:39–41
<p>“Now the lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (Jonah 1:17).</p>	<p>The Sign of Jonah</p>	<p>“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 the prophet Jonas.”</p>
<p>“And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).</p>	<p>Three Days and Nights</p>	<p>“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”</p>

Jonah and Ninevah	Theme	Matthew 12:39–41
<p>“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth . . . [and] turned from their evil way” (Jonah 3:5, 10).</p>	<p>Nineveh’s Repentance</p>	<p>“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas.”</p>
<p>Jonah’s preaching persuades more than 120,000 people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11) to repent, but Jesus is “greater than Jonah.”</p>	<p>Christ: One Greater Than Jonah</p>	<p>“And, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”</p>