

# The Sign of Jonah

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## Introduction

Matthew 12:39 (ASV) – “But he answered and said unto them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.’”

Luke 11:29 (ASV) – “And when the multitudes were gathering together unto him, he began to say, ‘This generation is an evil generation: it seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah.’”

One sign, no more, no less. That is all that Yeshua the Messiah promised to give to the adulterous generation of people he was living amongst and preaching to. So, what exactly is the “sign of Jonah?” The purpose of this study is to evaluate the parallels between Jonah and Yeshua and see how those parallels apply to the sign that Yeshua promised.

## The Sign and the Parallels

### *- Three Days and Three Nights -*

It is not the intent of this study to go into great detail about whether the phrase “three days and three nights” refers to three literal day/night periods (i.e. 72 hours) or any part of three different days. That subject has been covered extensively in works such as Harold W. Hoehner’s *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study I agree with Hoehner’s conclusion that the phrase “three days and three nights” is a documented Hebrew idiom that can be applied to any parts of three consecutive days.

That being said, we will move on to the first parallel. It is a very simple one. Yeshua states the parallel in no uncertain terms in the passage that follows.

Matthew 12:39-40 (ASV) – “But he answered and said unto them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

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<sup>1</sup> Hoehner, Harold W. “Chapter IV: The Day of Christ’s Crucifixion.” *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977.

Yeshua was speaking of the amount of time that he was going to be in the tomb after his death. Verses such as [Matthew 17:23](#), [20:19](#); [Luke 9:22](#), [18:33](#), and [24:46](#) make this clear. [Matthew 27:50-28:6](#) shows how Yeshua fulfilled this aspect of the sign of Jonah perfectly.

### - *Message of Repentance* -

Jonah's message, though solely speaking of the coming destruction of the city of Nineveh, was one that was ultimately intended to bring about the sincere repentance of its people toward **יהוה**. Indeed, Jonah complains to **יהוה** about this.

Jonah 4:1-3 (ASV) – “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed unto **יהוה**, and said, ‘I pray you, O **יהוה**, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious El, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repent you of the evil. Therefore now, O **יהוה**, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.’”

Jonah was well aware of the fact that if the city listened to **יהוה**'s message through him and turned from their wicked ways that **יהוה** would forgive them and relent from his destructive intentions. Yeshua's message was the same.

Matthew 4:17 (ASV) – “From that time began Yeshua to preach, and to say, ‘Repent you; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Mark 1:14-15 (ASV) – “Now after John was delivered up, Yeshua came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of Elohim, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of Elohim is at hand: repent you, and believe in the gospel.’”

But, did Yeshua's message come along with warnings of destruction as Jonah's did? Absolutely!

Matthew 24:1-2 (ASV) – “And Yeshua went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said unto them, ‘See you not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

Mark 13:1-2 (ASV) – “And as he went forth out of the temple, one of his disciples said unto him, ‘Teacher, behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings!’ And Yeshua said unto him, ‘See you these great buildings? There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down.’”

Luke 19:41-44 (ASV) – “And when he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong unto peace! But

now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall cast up a bank about you, and compass you round, and keep you in on every side, and shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another; because you knew not the time of your visitation.”

Luke 21:5-6 (ASV) – “And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said, ‘As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

These prophecies about the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem are an essential part of the sign of Jonah. We will look more at how that applies below. But for now what is important is to see that the messages of Jonah and Yeshua are parallel to one another. Jonah preached destruction to Nineveh with repentance being the end goal and Yeshua preached repentance and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. יהוה’s message was the same: “Repent and I will relent from the destruction prophesied over you.”

It is not only the messages themselves that are significant, however. The city of Nineveh, according to [Jonah 3:3](#), was exceedingly large, a three days’ journey across. This would mean that in order for יהוה’s message through Jonah to be heard by everyone in the city he would have been preaching for three days. There is a very significant and often overlooked parallel to Yeshua’s life in this as well.

Yeshua’s public ministry began just before Passover in 27 CE.<sup>2</sup> He was crucified on the day of Passover in 30 CE.<sup>3</sup> If we apply the scriptural day-for-year method<sup>4</sup> to this we find yet another parallel. Just as Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh lasted for 3 days, Yeshua’s ministry lasted 3 years.

### - *Time of Repentance* -

The number forty is used to represent many things in scripture, but the foremost is a time of trial or repentance. The Israelites wandered for forty years in the wilderness due to their disobedience. Yeshua was in the wilderness to be tempted by the enemy for forty days. But, most significantly for the study at hand, Nineveh was given forty days to repent before pending destruction from יהוה came upon them. This example of Nineveh’s time for repentance is very significant as it relates to Yeshua, his prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the sign of Jonah.

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<sup>2</sup> See [John 2:1-13](#). See also Jones, Floyd Nolen. “The Beginning Year of Our Lord’s Public Ministry.” [Chronology of the Old Testament](#). Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004. 219-220.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, Floyd Nolen. “The Year of the Crucifixion” and “The Crucifixion Year and Daniel’s 483-Year Prophecy.” [Chronology of the Old Testament](#). Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004. 220.

<sup>4</sup> The Seventy Sevens prophecy in [Daniel 9:24-27](#) is another example of the day-for-year method in scripture.

There is an entire section of the sign of Jonah spoken by Yeshua that is almost always overlooked.

Matthew 12:41 (ASV) – “The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”

Why does Yeshua warn them about the Ninevites condemning that generation in the future? The reason is simple. Nineveh was given forty days to repent from their sins against יהוה and they did. יהוה then relented his anger and plans for destruction. But Israel, as history shows, did not follow the example of the Ninevites. As mentioned above, Yeshua was crucified and died on the Day of Passover in the year 30 CE. The Roman armies under Titus pitched their camps for the siege on Jerusalem on the Day of Passover in 70 CE.<sup>5</sup> Israel was given forty years to repent of their sin of killing their Messiah and Master, the Son of Almighty יהוה, Yeshua, and they did not repent. So, the destruction prophesied against them came to pass without fail.

To see how this applies to the sign of Jonah we again refer to the day-for-year method. יהוה gave the Ninevites forty days to repent from their sins. He gave the Israel of Yeshua’s day forty years. The parallel couldn’t be more apparent and more striking.

## Conclusion

The following table illustrates all of the parallels between Jonah and Yeshua, as they relate to the sign of Jonah.

	Jonah	Yeshua
Time hidden from the world	3 days & 3 nights (belly of fish)	3 days & 3 nights (heart of earth)
Type of preaching	Repentance and Destruction	Repentance and Destruction
Length of Ministry	3 days	3 years
Period given by יהוה for repentance	40 days	40 years

<sup>5</sup> Josephus, Flavius. “Wars of the Jews. Book 5, Chapter III.” The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged. Trans. William Whiston. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987.

When all aspects of the sign of Jonah are carefully evaluated we can easily see how powerful the sign really is. Yeshua gave his generation one of the most profound signs they could ever hope to see, and he gave us one of the most compelling proofs for his Messiahship we could ever ask for. HalleluYah!