

Matthew 2:7-12

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.

It was probably about thirty years ago someone asked me "Did you know Jesus went to hell and back?" Surprised by this question I said "No, I didn't now that." Then she talked about how the preacher mentioned it. It sparked my interest enough to research it. I encourage everyone to take the time to research what anyone says about religion. No one person or theological doctrine has a monopoly on biblical interpretation.

The sign of Jonah is often overlooked. It pertains to the death and resurrection of Jesus are rarely gets covered during Lent or Easter services. To understand the Scripture we need to consider the context. Jesus is traveling with his disciples. The more he heals and preaches, the more popular he becomes and the bigger the threat he presents to the religious leaders. While he is in a synagogue he is challenged by the Pharisees who are looking for a way to accuse him. They challenged him on the law for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus points out they hypocrisy. They would rescue a sheep on the Sabbath if it was trapped and a human being is much more important. Jesus does not back down from them and heals a man. The Pharisees conspire to destroy him. Jesus learns of this and leaves the area to in order to continue his mission of teaching, healing, and addressing their hypocrisy.

The opposition to Jesus grows as religious leaders fear losing control of the religious establishment. They are frustrated with Jesus because he is not one of them and does not support their policies. They can't control him and they can't stop him. So, they want to destroy him. What is tragic is that it is God's own people that resist what is proven to be divine and ask for a sign. The scribes and Pharisees challenge his divine authority after witnessing miracles that are beyond human ability. The demand for a sign of divinity is a problem of authoritarianism. The self-righteous sense of entitlement that wants to force you to obey their rules; they do not care about what is good for the people. They deny the reality of the divine status of Jesus. They reject his divine status in spite of the evidence and demand a stupendous miracle. These are bullies trying to force compliance. They think that they get to set the standards of judgment, but they do not, because God is in control. The great stupendous miracle that God has planned is the death and resurrection of Jesus. The sign is God's sign. It will come according to God's terms. The problem is not just denial. The problem is one of manipulation. The people that are plotting to kill him have seen the exorcisms that can only be a sign of God. It may seem strange that after casting out demons, as a sign of the kingdom's presence, that they demand a sign. It means that they are rejecting the action of Jesus as being of divine origin. Their demand for a sign is an attempt to discredit the legitimacy of Jesus. Their demand is a smoke screen to hide their true motives. However, the healings from Jesus are not for the purpose of authenticating his teaching, they are a manifestation of a much greater divine presence.

Jesus calls out the hypocrisy by classifying this as an evil and adulterous generation. The sign of Jonah is a prophetic metaphor there is no sign that will be available for you except for the

sign of Jonah. There is no sign that will be given to you except in realm of prophecy. In the coming future the prophecy will be confirmed. Traditional Christian doctrine is that the heart of the earth is a descent into Hades. However, this is not what the scriptures state but is a common interpretation. The scriptures do not say Jesus went to hell or Hades. In Matthew it is the heart of the earth. In Luke the sign of Jonah is a sign for the people. In 1st Peter Jesus proclaimed to the spirits in prison. The descent of Jesus into Hades is an interpretation. It is not what the scriptures actually say. Therefore, it needs to be handled in context and not distract us from what is much more important – the death & resurrection of Jesus.

When it comes to the concept of Jesus' journey into the abyss, my point of view is that this is an interpretation, it is not what the scriptures actually state. It needs to be preached as an interpretation, not as a fact. It should not distract us from what is the most important of all. Jesus suffered and died on the cross for your sins and was resurrected.