

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
S. Learning From God's Eventual Rejection Of Unbelievers
(Matthew 12:38-45)

I. Introduction

- A. Though Christ's ministry of preaching the gospel of the Messianic Kingdom and healing the infirmed was initially widely received, Israel's leaders publicly rejected Him in Matthew 12:22-37 with Mark 3:20-30.
- B. Accordingly, Christ eventually rejected these unbelieving leaders in Matthew 12:38-45, a passage that is instructive for us on the need for people to respond in faith to God's work lest He eventually rejects them. We thus view Matthew 12:38-45 for our insight, application and edification:

II. Learning From God's Eventual Rejection Of Unbelievers, Matthew 12:38-45.

- A. Immediately after Christ's Matthew 12:24-37 rebuke of the Pharisees' claim that He cast out demons by Satan's power, the Matthew 12:38-45 conversation occurred: the Greek adverb *Tote* starts verse 38 and means "then." (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 45; Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 831)
- B. Accordingly, when the scribes and Pharisees "replied" (*apokrinomai*, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 92-93) to Christ's Matthew 12:24-37 rebuke, asking Him for a sign "that would prove to them He was what He claimed to be," they spoke "from unbelief." (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 1991, p. 208) They "knew full well that Jesus was claiming to be the heaven-sent Messiah. They were familiar with the multitude of miracles He had already performed to authenticate His person" that also clearly fulfilled prophecies like Isaiah 35:5 and 61:1, "(b)ut now they came to challenge Him," Ibid.
- C. Their request "did not arise from faith but from unbelief. They had refused to believe His words and His signs, and this indicated that they were evil . . . 'a wicked and adulterous generation' (Matt. 12:39)," Ibid.
- D. For this reason, Jesus responded to the petition for a sign that no sign would be given to them but that of the prophet Jonah. As Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days and nights, the Son of man would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth, the grave, Matthew 12:40. Jonah's return from the fish's belly after three days and nights attested to the men of Nineveh that he had been sent from God, so Christ's return from death and burial in the earth after three days and nights would similarly testify to Israel that He was sent from God. (Ibid., p. 209, citing Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1912, vol. 2, p. 200)
- E. For this reason, Jesus said that the men of Nineveh would rise in judgment with that generation in Israel and condemn it, for the men of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching, but a greater messenger from God had come to Israel in the Person of the Incarnate Son of God, but Israel had not believed Him, Matthew 12:41.
- F. In addition, Jesus said that the Queen of Sheba would rise up in the judgment with that generation in Israel and condemn it, for she came from the far ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but that a greater Wise Teacher existed in Jesus than Solomon, but that generation in Israel did not accept Him, Matthew 12:42.
- G. Christ then illustrated the dire spiritual condition of Israel, Matthew 12:43-45a (Ibid., Pentecost, p. 208-209):
 - 1. Jesus said that when a demon leaves a man, it goes about seeking rest but is unable to find it, v. 43.
 - 2. Remembering the body where it formerly indwelt, the demon returns and finds the man freed from evil spirits, so it determines to reenter the man along with many more demons more wicked than itself and they enter and possess the man so that the latter state of the man is worse than his initial state, Matt. 12:44-45a.
 - 3. This illustration referred to Israel's plight as follows (Ibid., p. 209-210, citing Edersheim, Ibid., p. 201):
 - a. When Messiah's forerunner John the Baptist came on Israel's national scene preaching the baptism of repentance, the nation had outwardly appeared to heed his message. (Matthew 3:1-6)
 - b. However, hypocrisy was a major problem in this response to John's ministry: John himself had criticized the Sadducees and Pharisees who came to him for the baptism of repentance since they lacked evidence of true repentance in their lives, Matthew 3:7-8.
 - c. When Jesus then arrived performing miracles in the Holy Spirit's power, testifying that He was the Messiah from God, the false repentance of Israel's leaders under John surfaced as unbelief in Jesus so that their latter state was worse than their state with the external repentance they had exhibited under John!

Lesson: *Israel's leaders failed truly to repent under John the Baptist's ministry so that when the Messiah arrived performing miracles that fulfilled Scripture, they did not believe in Him, falling into deep spiritual darkness, even to their trying to challenge Christ to perform an attesting sign in their unbelief.*

Application: *May we heed what we know of Scripture lest we risk sinking into unbelief and spiritual darkness.*