



[Matthew 12:38-40](#)

(38) Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Master, we desire to see a sign from You." (39) And He answered *and* said to them, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. (40) For just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, in like manner the Son of man shall be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

[Matthew 16:4](#)

(4) A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet." Then He left them and went away.

[Luke 11:29-30](#)

(29) Now when the multitudes had crowded around even more, He began to say, "This is an evil generation, seeking after a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. (30) For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, in the same way also shall the Son of man be a sign to this generation.

A Faithful Version

Did the day of Jesus' resurrection cause a change in the day of worship?

The Saturday/Sunday resurrection issue has been a focal point of debate in many circles because of the impact that it *could* have on the correct day of

worship. But to begin here is to begin with an assumption at best, and a conclusion at worst. Where in the Bible is there any indication given that Jesus Christ's death would change the day of worship? Does our [God](#) change things on a whim—especially something as foundational as the day on which He meets with His people?

[James 1:17](#) says that in God there is no variation, no shadow of turning. God does not change—His fundamental character and approach to things is constant ([Malachi 3:6](#))! [Hebrews 13:8-9](#) says that [Jesus Christ](#) is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and immediately after this the author says, "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines." God's changelessness is a major defense we have against false doctrine! Once He establishes something, is He going to change it out of hand? Could we trust a God that is so undependable and unpredictable?

The high regard that God gives to the seventh-day [Sabbath](#) is evident throughout the [Old Testament](#). Time and again, ancient Israel went into captivity because of their sins of Sabbath-breaking and idolatry (e.g., Ezekiel 20). No indication is ever given that the Sabbath is temporary, to be changed, or that God really does not care one way or the other. In fact, the prophecies of the Old Testament show that the Sabbath will be kept after God restores all things by establishing His [Kingdom on earth](#) ([Isaiah 66:22-23](#); [Ezekiel 44:24](#); [45:17](#); [46:3](#)).

[The gospel](#) writers also do not give any hint or suggestion that the sanctification that God gave to the Sabbath would somehow be switched to the [first day of the week](#). Jesus Christ gives no indication whatever that the day of worship would change upon His death or resurrection. God made only one day each week holy ([Genesis 2:3](#); [Exodus 20:11](#)), and the Bible gives no record of His even thinking about changing it. In addition, He does not give man the authority to "choose" which day each week is holy. Consider how often Jesus and the Pharisees argued over the Sabbath. Yet, not once did they contend over which *day* should be kept holy; in every instance, the issue was on *how* to keep the day that had already been firmly established as holy. Not only did Christ keep the Sabbath and teach others on the Sabbath, but after His death the apostles also kept it.

So we have the seventh-day Sabbath strongly established in the Old Testament (and even practiced in Exodus 16 *before* the proposal of the Old Covenant in Exodus 20). We have the example of Christ's keeping the Sabbath, without any indication that His ministry or His death would change it. And we have the New Testament church continuing to keep it after His death. How do the date and timing of His resurrection play into this? ***It does not ! The sole purpose of Christ foretelling how long He would be in the grave is to prove that He was the Messiah—not to change which day is holy.***

Jesus gave only one sign that He was the Messiah, sent by God—He would be in the grave three days and three nights (72 hours), and then would be resurrected by God, something which He could not control Himself. So the question of whether or not He was in the grave three days and three nights has nothing to do with which day God set apart and made holy, and everything to do with whether Jesus Christ was the Messiah!

The "sign of Jonah" is not a sign of preaching or bringing a message, as some allege. Certainly Jonah did that, just as Christ did. But that selective and erroneous interpretation conveniently overlooks the plain meaning of Jesus' words.

The "sign of Jonah" is mentioned three times in the gospels:

1) "And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, 'This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation'" ([Luke 11:29-30](#)).

Notice that He does not specify what the sign is here, but only alludes to a comparison with Jonah. He says that there is a sign, but does not say what it was.

2) "Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him, asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. . . . 'A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.' And He left them and departed" ([Matthew 16:1](#), 4).

Again, there is no elaboration here, but this is actually the second time it is mentioned in the book of Matthew. The first occurrence demonstrates plainly what the sign of Jonah was, and so here Christ is merely repeating His answer from [Matthew 12:38-40](#):

3) "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*'" ([Matthew 12:38-40](#); see [Jonah 1:17](#)).

Both the account in Luke 11 and the one in Matthew 12 also mention Nineveh, and even Jonah's preaching. It is plain in both instances that they are mentioned to contrast the righteousness of previous generations with the righteousness of the current generation, particularly the Pharisees. To read into these scriptures that the "Sign of Jonah" is merely preaching is to horribly twist the Word of God—especially when [Matthew 12:40](#) states categorically that, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights [in the heart of the earth](#)."

Those listening were certainly not confused about Christ's allusion to Jonah. It was plain to them that He predicted when He would arise: "On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, 'Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, "[After three days](#) I will rise.'" Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, "He has risen from the dead." So the last deception will be worse than the first'" ([Matthew 27:62-64](#)). Even the Pharisees understood that Jesus Christ's statement was focused on the timing of the resurrection!

In other verses, Jesus says He would rise "the third day" ([Matthew 16:21](#); [Mark 10:34](#); [Luke 24:7](#)). There is no contradiction between this expression and the term "three days and three nights." Both expressions are used interchangeably in the scriptures. In Genesis, for example, we read that "God

divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the first day . . . and the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the second day . . . and the evening [now three periods of night] and the morning [now three periods of light] were the third day" ([Genesis 1:4-13](#)). Here the term "the third day" is shown to include three days and three nights.

Whether or not Jesus fulfilled the sign of Jonah by being in the grave three days and three nights (which cannot fit between late Friday and early Sunday) is of great importance in verifying that He was and is our Messiah. But it has nothing to do with which day of the week is holy.

— David C. Grabbe

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