

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY SIXTEEN

Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50

May God deliver us from external religion and make us aware of how deeply we need His truth and His Son to set us free.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the crowds of people swelled around Jesus, so did the waves of attacks from His enemies. The Pharisees pressed Jesus at every opportunity with questions to entrap Him, accusations to condemn Him, and demands to make Him bow to their authority.

Yet Jesus stood firm against them. He defended His divine authority as “Lord, even over the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), and He proved that His power over spiritual forces came from the Spirit of God (12:28–29).

Now, in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll focus on the Pharisees challenging Jesus’ miraculous signs:

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.” (12:38)

While their request may seem genuine, a strong undertow of cynicism swirled beneath the surface. They came not with hearts open to believe but with arms crossed—daring Jesus to meet their standard. Jesus refused to subject Himself to their judgment. In fact, by their own words and actions, they judged themselves. Let’s enter the scene as Jesus stands up to His critics and issues strong words of confrontation.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

When fears grow and we struggle in our faith, we may cross the line from trusting God to testing Him, from calling out for help to demanding the Lord to prove Himself. As you turn to His Word, open your heart and draw near to the Lord as your closest family member, which, as you will see in our passage, He is! Write your prayer below, bringing any fears or struggles you may have to your heavenly Father.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 12:38–50*. Keep in mind that Jesus aimed His rebukes specifically at the Pharisees and scribes and their followers. Jesus called them “this evil generation” (Matthew 12:45), because they had the unique privilege of seeing the Messiah in person, but they rejected Him.

The Pharisees had already condemned Jesus as a counterfeit in league with Satan and had begun plotting to kill Him. In light of their hostility toward Jesus, why do you think they were asking Him for a sign now?



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Observation: Signs, Spirits, and Siblings

A technique in *Searching the Scriptures* is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene.¹ Picture the cynical Pharisees as they demanded, “we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority” (Matthew 12:38). Hear their mocking tone when they addressed Jesus as “Teacher” and see their faces set like stone in a condescending scowl. It’s understandable that Jesus would respond as harshly as He did.

Miraculous Signs That People Crave—Matthew 12:38–42

What comparison did Jesus make between Himself and the prophet Jonah, according to [Matthew 12:39–40](#)?

In the interpretation section, we’ll look at what Jesus meant. For now, how did Jesus say the Jews were *unlike* the people of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba ([Matthew 12:41–42](#))?



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Jesus purposefully declared that He was greater than Jonah the *prophet* and greater than Solomon the *king*. Referring to *priests* serving in the temple, Jesus previously stated that He was “greater than the Temple!” (Matthew 12:6). Put these three “greater than” statements together and write down what Jesus was saying about His three messianic roles.

In Matthew’s gospel, Gentiles kept appearing as models of what the Pharisees lacked. The magi were willing to follow Christ’s star, the Roman centurion exhibited great faith, the Ninevites repented with weeping, and the foreign queen of Sheba eagerly sought God’s wisdom. In contrast, the Jewish leaders ignored the prophecies, mistrusted Jesus, refused to repent, and would not listen!

As a result, according to Jesus, the consequences would be severe.

Evil Spirits That Leave and Return—Matthew 12:43–45

Because the Pharisees had the ideal opportunity to accept the Messiah but rejected Him, they would end up worse off than if they had never met Jesus. How did Jesus describe the Pharisees’ tragic condition in *Matthew 12:43–45*?

The Pharisees said that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan, when, in fact, they were the ones oppressed with demons. They were the ones wicked enough to speak for the enemy. Their cynicism and self-righteousness were signs of external reform with no internal transformation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Spiritual Relationships That Outrank the Family—Matthew 12:46–50

Just as Jesus was rebuking His enemies, His mother and brothers arrived. Jesus took their coming as an opportunity to make a point to His followers. According to [Matthew 12:46–50](#), what did Jesus say to encourage the faithful?

In the family of Christ, relationships can be deeply satisfying and fulfilling because they are like relationships in our family. We could go anywhere in the world and spend time with someone in the family of God and he or she would be just like one of our own family.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Three Nights and Three Days

Perhaps the religious authorities expected Jesus to turn a staff into a snake, like the sign Moses gave Pharaoh to prove his authority. To their surprise, Jesus gave them a sign from Jonah's experience in the belly of a big fish.

What Jonah-like miracle did Jesus say would prove His authority, according to [Matthew 12:40](#)? For help with the answer, read pages 258–259 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.



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The answer comes with an interpretive problem about the amount of time Jesus would spend in the “heart of the earth.” Read the excursus in Pastor Chuck’s commentary on page 259 and write down the nature of the problem and how it is resolved.

Although veiled, this prediction of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the first of two other predictions in [16:21](#) and [20:17–19](#). What facts did Jesus reveal in increasing detail in these verses?

The Pharisees’ demand for a miraculous sign was an obvious smokescreen for their lack of faith. Even after Jesus became a walking miracle after His resurrection—an undeniable demonstration of His authority over sin and death—the Pharisees still refused to believe!

Pause for a moment to reflect on the resurrection as proof of Jesus’ *ultimate* authority. How does recalling this miracle encourage your faith when you struggle?



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Correlation: Jesus' Own Family

At this time in Jesus' ministry, Jesus' hometown friends and even His family struggled to believe in Him. Let's explore what the following verses say about those closest to Jesus and their attitudes toward Him.

What does *Matthew 13:55–57* say about those who knew Jesus when He grew up in Nazareth?

How did certain family members respond to Jesus in *Mark 3:20–21*?

How did Jesus' brothers react to Jesus in *John 7:1–5*?

Unlike the Pharisees, however, Jesus' brothers heeded the sign of the resurrection. "The brothers of Jesus" (Acts 1:14) were among the believers waiting for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, confirming their turn from skepticism to faith. Jesus' half-brother, James, even went on to become the leader of the Jerusalem church and the author of the epistle of James. So, it's encouraging to remember that those we care about the most can come to faith in Christ.



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Application: Three Questions to Consider

Let's conclude our study with some soul-searching questions. The Pharisees' example of extreme disbelief prompts us to ask ourselves: *Am I becoming cynical, even in a small way? Is it enough for me that Jesus is raised from the dead and alive today? Or do I need more signs to prove Himself to me?*

Weighing themselves on the scale of religious merit, the Pharisees regarded themselves as holier than anyone else. Why repent? They had no *need*. Such is the central flaw of moralists, who refuse to look past their external morality to deeper issues of the heart. So ask yourself, *Am I becoming more open to the inner work of the Spirit?*

Finally, the most fundamental question: *Am I placing Jesus Christ first in my life?* Jesus' own family could have stood in the way of Him fulfilling His calling, but He didn't let them. If your family stood in your way, would you still put Jesus first and follow Him regardless?

Use the following space as a mini journal to reflect on these questions. Take your fears and faith-struggles to the Lord and write down your desire to trust Him completely. Invite His Spirit to transform you and follow Him with your whole heart.

If you are the only Christian in your family, you may feel some alienation. The love may be present but not the unity. Jesus Himself bore a similar heartache, and He offers a spiritual intimacy that family members can't provide. Draw near to Him in prayer and come alongside other believers in fellowship as you follow God's call.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, forgive me for the times I wavered in faith, questioned Your goodness, and put Your power to the test. The resurrection of Christ is all I need to know without doubt that You are sufficient. When I feel distant from others, draw Me near Your Son. When the people I love don't love You like I do, help me find a Christian friend who will walk with me. Thank You for being my Father and for giving me an eternal family of faith, in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

