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MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THE SIGN OF JONAH IN MATTHEW 12:38-42 AND 16:1-4

Introduction

1. Question

Which metaphors and comparisons did Matthew use to express hope for resurrection? The religious and cultural contexts of his theological thoughts are explored in the first part of this volume. This second part deals with particular texts that are not limited to the resurrection narratives in Matt 28. In what follows we will have a close look at Matthew's understanding of Jonah's sign. What did he mean with the sign of Jonah? Did Matthew understand it in terms of resurrection? And if so, did he follow examples of the past? Why did he mention the sign of Jonah in this particular context of his composition?

2. State of research

It is worthwhile to investigate the issue again, in particular as the sign of Jonah is one of the open questions and desiderates left open by modern exegetes. Modern publications are rare. G.M. Landes and K. Huber² argue that the text is coherent and that two interpretations of Jonah's sign are discussed among scholars. Both point to the different possibilities of interpretation without solving the enigma. Even recent commentaries³ refer to the

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² Most recent publications are A.K.M. Adam, *The Sign of Jonah: A Fish-Eye View*, in *Semeia* 51 (1990) 177-191; S. Chow, *The Sign of Jonah Reconsidered: A Study of its Meaning in the Gospel Traditions* (ConBNT, 27), Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995; E. Fales, *Taming the Tehom: The Sign of Jonah in Matthew*, in R.M. Price – J.J. Lowder (eds.), *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*, Amherst, N.Y., Prometheus Books, 2005, pp. 307-348. Fales analyzes the difference between the three days and nights and the third day of resurrection in Matthew's passion narrative; D. Rudman, *The Sign of Jonah*, in *ExpTim* 115 (2004) 325-328. G.M. Landes, *Jonah in Luke: The Hebrew Bible Background to the Interpretation of the 'Sign of Jonah' Pericope in Luke 11.29-32*, in R.D. Weis – D.M. Carr (eds.), *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders* (JSOTSup, 225), Sheffield, JSOT-Press, 1996, pp. 133-163; K. Huber, „Zeichen des Jona“ und „mehr als Jona“: *Die Gestalt des Jona im Neuen Testament und ihr Beitrag zur bibeltheologischen Fragestellung*, in *PzB* 7,2 (1998) pp. 77-94; R.K. Soulen, *The Sign of Jonah*, in *ThTo* 65,3(2008) 331-343.

³ Cf. for example P. Fiedler, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (ThKNT, 1), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 2006.

classical writers on the topic: A. Vögtle's publication from the year 1971⁴ or J. Jeremias' article⁵ in the ThWNT from 1938 are often quoted⁶. The issues discussed among scholars mostly comprise the methodologies of literary criticism, redaction criticism⁷ and traditional criticism⁸. Recent articles⁹ on the issue summarise the problems but do neither offer an own approach nor an appropriate solution. The main question of this contribution is if the sign of Jonah is connected with the idea of resurrection.

3. Methodology

In order to find appropriate answers to the question if the sign of Jonah is connected with the idea of resurrection we will have a closer look at the theology of the book of Jonah and its reception in early Judaism before analysing the text passages in Matthew's Gospel. Furthermore, we examine the understanding of Jonah in the NT writings in general and then more specific in Matthew. After comparing Matt 12:38-42 and 16:1-4 with its Marcan Vorlage we will analyse both texts in detail. In particular, we will explore the context and composition of both text segments in order to understand the theological argumentation. Furthermore, we will explore the texts itself with special regard to the following aspects: addressees (respective opponents), motivation of their demand for a sign, kind of sign, the understanding of σημεῖον in Matthew, and Jesus' interpretation of Jonah's sign in Matthew. Therefore, the meaning of the duration of three days and three nights in the Bible will be most important.

I. Jonah in the Old Testament

Jonah is one of the Twelve Prophets. In the Hebrew tradition with its chronological order of the prophetic books it stands between Obadiah and Micah, all prophets of the 8th century. The Minor Prophets are thematically arranged in the LXX. Jonah is the first of two prophets (Nahum is the second) pronouncing judgment on the Gentiles.

This little booklet has a special position within the prophetic writings insofar as it is a prophetic narrative with only one prophetic word (3:4). The name of the prophet is programmatic: Jonah means "dove" or "oppressiveness" which characterises the lack of

⁴ Cf. A. Vögtle, *Der Spruch vom Jonazeichen*, in: Id., *Evangelium und die Evangelien. Beiträge zur Evangelienforschung* (KBANT), Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1971, pp. 103-136.

⁵ J. Jeremias, Ἰωνᾶς, in ThWNT 3 (1938) pp. 410-413.

⁶ Cf. further older publications R.A. Edwards, *The Sign of Jonah in the Theology of the Evangelists and Q* (SBT, 2/18), London, SCM, 1971; G. Schmitt, *Das Zeichen des Jona*, in ZNW 69 (1978) 123-129; P. Seidelin, *Das Jonazeichen*, in ST 5 (1951) pp. 119-131.

⁷ Cf. A. Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (RNT), Regensburg, Pustet, 1986, pp.265-267. He argues for the later redaction of vv. 41-42 (p. 265). Consequently he interprets the sign of Jonah as a reflection of the post-Eastern church.

⁸ Cf. A. Fuchs, *Das Zeichen des Jona: Vom Rückfall*, in SNTSU, 19 (1994) 131-160 and J.L. Reed, *The Sign of Jonah (Q 11:29-32) and other Epic Traditions in Q*, in E.A. Castelli – H. Taussig (Eds.), *Reimagining Christian Origins*, Valley Forge, Pa., Trinity Press, 1996, pp. 130-143.

⁹ Cf. K. Huber, *Zeichen*, pp. 77-94.

direction. The prophet portrays Israel's senselessness and lack of loyalty in flitting back and forth between Assyria and Egypt (Hos 7:11-12; 11:11).

The book of Jonah has a clear twofold parallel structure with an additional element in the second part:

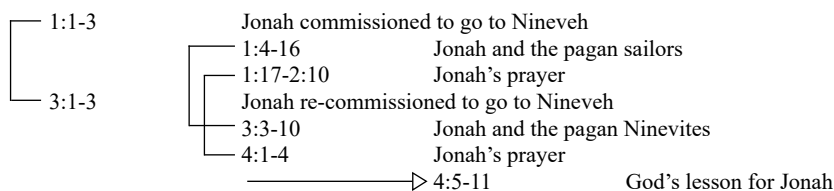


Illustration 1: Composition of the Book of Jonah.

The narrative works with contrasts, parallel structures, keywords, repetitions, parody, and a turning point. The prophetic commission in 1:1 and 3:1 (“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying”) demands from Jonah preaching against Nineveh because of the wickedness of the inhabitants. Instead, Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish, a place which is similar to the original destination of Jonah. According to Isa 66:19 Tarshish is described as a place where YHWH is unknown: “And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations.” Only after calling him a second time Jonah obeys God. The inhabitants of Nineveh came to believe in God and proclaimed a fasting. Their key question is: “Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?” (3:9). This question is put to Israel.

It is part of the bitter parody and the turning point of the story that God asks the prophet if he is able to change his mind (4:11). The book leaves the reader with an open end and many questions: Can Jonah change his mind about God? And if God can: We can do! Can Jonah move away from his anger? The main question is not: Can God change? But: Can Jonah change? What about the reader's image of God? Can they believe that God is merciful towards everybody? Can they give a last chance not only to themselves but also to many others who might not deserve his mercy in their eyes?

In the Hebrew Bible Jonah includes many messages for Israel: Israel is told how quickly pagan people can convert to the God of Israel and how God comes to the prophet. Israel is told how great God's mercy is with the Gentiles. There is a tension in the Twelve-Prophets book between the salvation of Israel and the nations.

In summary, the book of Jonah is a lesson on the image of God and the conversion of the Gentiles. The image of a changing God serves as a model for the prophetic announcement of Israel's opening towards the Gentiles. The alternative between an exclusive merciful or righteous God is contradicted by Jonah's theology. His image of God is full of surprises and breaks up the classical fixed theological reflection¹⁰. Jonah criticizes the idea of an available God. The book contains extensive theological criticism by con-

¹⁰ C. Ruhe-Glatt, *Das Zeichen des Jona*, in *PzB* 10(2001) pp. 41-56, p. 54.

demning doctrinal theology and its application to daily life. It exceeds all expectations towards God. The truth of God cannot be fixed in institutions or language. The only problem is the prophet Jonah struggling with this new insight.

The little story of the fish appointed by God to swallow Jonah (1:17-2:10) including Jonah's pious thanksgiving prayer is part of the narrator's irony: Jonah is going down – into the deepest depth. He is close to death but rescued by God's word (2:11). The ideas of death and rescue are crucial in the Jonah story. But rescue did not yet point to the idea of resurrection as it did not exist in this time¹¹.

II. Rewritten Jonah in the OT and in Jewish Literature

1. Jonah in the OT

Apart from the Book of Jonah the prophet is only mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as a son of the prophet Amittai from Gathheper. In the Hebrew OT, Jonah indeed is a minor prophet who is mentioned merely in 2 Kings.

The second reference from the deuterocanonical writings is uncertain in terms of textual criticism. Tobit 14:4.8 reveals Tobit's final consideration to go to Media because Nineveh will fully be overthrown. It seems as if Jonah played just a supporting role in the OT. This impression can be explained with the characterisation of the prophet as a type of anti-hero (in contrast to Abraham's obedience) in the book of Jonah itself.

2. Jonah in Jewish Literature¹²

In the apocryphal writings from the 1st century BC until 1st century AC Jonah plays a leading role. 4 Ezra 1:39 mentions Jonah along with other Israel leaders and minor prophets: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah etc. Thus, the three patriarchs are listed together with the Twelve Prophets with Jonah at the sixth position. 3 Macc reminds of Jonah's unharmed rescue with the prayer of Eleazar. He regards him as a descendant of Abraham and mentions him together with the three companions in Babylon and Daniel (6:2-8). Only the younger LXX and the apocryphal writings are interested in Jonah as a descendant of Abraham and leader of Israel.

The Jewish chronicler Flavius Josephus retells the Jonah narrative in his *Jewish Antiquities* (9.206-215). His portrayal of Jonah differs from the OT in regard to some important details. Firstly, he overemphasizes Jonah's flight on a ship and the story with the fish. Secondly, he mixes up Tarshish with Tarsus in Cilicia, the birthplace of Paul, and changes the dry land upon which Jonah is being deposited to the Black Sea. Thirdly, he underlines that Jonah was a Hebrew by nation and a prophet of God. Fourthly, he distinguishes between a whale and large fish. Fifthly, he portrays Jonah as a prophet confessing his sins,

¹¹ Cf. U. Simon, *Jona. Ein jüdischer Kommentar* (SBS, 157), Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994; H.J. Opgen-Rhein, *Jonapsalm und Jonabuch. Sprachgestalt, Entstehungsgeschichte und Kontextbedeutung von Jona 2* (SBB, 38), Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997; Ruhe-Glatt, *Das Zeichen des Jona*, pp. 41-56.

¹² E. Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yahud* (JSOTSup, 367), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

prophesying in Nineveh and returning. Sixthly, the Jonah story is embedded in Israel's history insofar as he should have promised wars and expeditions of Israel's leaders. Seventhly, he proclaims the loss of Asia if Nineveh will not convert. The narrative finishes with Jonah going home. In summary, Flavius Josephus stretches the first part of Jonah while shortening its second part. He portrays Jonah as a prophet who finally obeys God. His narrative lacks the parody of its original¹³.

Furthermore, the Jerusalem Targum Deut 30:13¹⁴ mentions Jonah. Two aspects are pointed out: 1. Jonah's descending into the depths of the sea, and 2. Jonah's proclaiming the commands of the sea. Jonah is presented as an escaping and repentance preaching prophet. The story about the fish is of marginal importance in the Jewish tradition¹⁵.

Just so sum up, the supporting role of Jonah is extended in the LXX, the deuterocanonical and early Jewish writings which were known to the NT writers. The anti-hero mutates into a leader of Israel, a descendant of Abraham and a hero who had expected God's rescue from the fish.

III. Rewritten Jonah in the New Testament

1. References

In the NT the book of Jonah appears in a completely different way than it is rewritten in the OT and Jewish writings. It is only referred to by name in the synoptic gospels (Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-32¹⁶). Furthermore, Mark 8:11-13¹⁷ and in John 6:22-59 (in particular v.30) mention a sign.

According to the list of "loci citati vel allegati" in Nestle-Aland's 27th edition further allusions and quotations to the Book of Jonah can be found in the NT. They almost exclusively can be found in the gospel tradition¹⁸:

¹³ *Ant.* 9.206-215.

¹⁴ "Neither is the law beyond the great sea, that thou shouldst say, O that we had one like Jonah the prophet, who could descend into the depths of the sea, and bring it to us, and make us hear its commands, that we may do them!"

¹⁵ Cf. U. Steffen, *Jona und der Fisch: Der Mythos von Tod und Wiedergeburt*, Stuttgart, Kreuz Verlag, 1982, pp. 47-61.

¹⁶ G.M. Landes, *Jonah*, pp. 133-163.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Swetnam, *No Sign of Jonah*, in *Bib.* 66 (1985) pp. 126-130 argues that missing a sign in Mark is part of his christology (Messiasgeheimnis). "He wishes to show that Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense [...] Hence Mark does not invoke the resurrection as a sign of divine authentication of who Jesus was and what Jesus did" (J. Swetnam, *Some signs of Jonah*, in *Bib.* 68 [1987] pp. 74-79, p. 74).

¹⁸ Cf. the list of "loci citati vel allegati" in Nestle-Aland, 27th edition (p. 799).

Chart 1: Rewritten Jonah in the NT

NT	Jonah 1	Jonah 2	Jonah 3	Jonah 4
Matt 23:35 ¹⁹	v.4			
Matt 8:24; Mark 4:37 (great storm)	vv.4ff			
Acts 27:19 (shipwreck)	v.5			
Rev 11:13 ²⁰	v.9			
Mark 4:41 (storm on the sea)	v.10			
John 11:50 ²¹	vv.12-15			
Luke 21:25 (eschatological signs)	v.15			
Mark 4:41 (storm on the sea)	v.16			
Matt 12:40; 16:4; 1 Cor 15:4 (resurrection on third day)		v.1		
Matt 12:41; Luke 11:32 (sign of Jonah)			v.5	
Matt 11:21; Luke 10:13 (unrepentant cities)			vv.5f	
Matt 2:10 (star of Bethlehem) ²²				v.6
Matt 26:38; Mark 14:34 (Jesus praying in Gethsemane) ²³				v.9

Some of the allusions listed up in the recent (27th) edition of Nestle-Aland are quite uncertain or doubtful: Matt 2:10; 23:35; 26:38; Mark 14:34; John 11:50 and Rev 11:13. Furthermore, it is noticeable that 1 Cor 15:4 is mentioned although the only connection to Jonah is the motive of the third day. And the very common motive of a storm on sea unambiguously cannot be derived from Jonah. The clearest link is the direct quotation in Matthew.

In particular, Jonah's escaping from his vocation and the fish swallowing him (1:4-2:1) is of interest for the NT writers. Furthermore, the conversion of the people of Nineveh in 3:5-6 is referred to in the NT. It surprises that the NT writers did not pay explicit attention to the two psalms in Jonah 1:17-2:10; 4:1-4 interrupting the narrative.

Most of the alluded verses in the NT are from Jonah chapter one. Apart from the synoptic tradition Jonah is mentioned just once in John, Acts, Rev, and 1 Cor. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew is highly relevant in regard to the reception of Jonah in the NT. Only once Jonah is directly quoted in Matt 12:40.

Finally, we have to look closer at one important aspect of the rewriting process of the OT in the NT. When NT writers quote a verse from the OT or just allude to it, they might mean the entire context. In particular, this is the fact in Matthew's gospel (e.g.: Ps 22:1 in Matt 27:46). A singular verse indicates the theological message of the entire writing.

¹⁹ Allusion is doubtful.

²⁰ Allusion is doubtful.

²¹ Allusion is doubtful.

²² Allusion is doubtful.

²³ Allusion is doubtful.

Fulfilment quotations comment on an event and contain Christological statements. Hence, the quotation of the sign of Jonah also might point to other aspects of the complex narrative of Jonah.

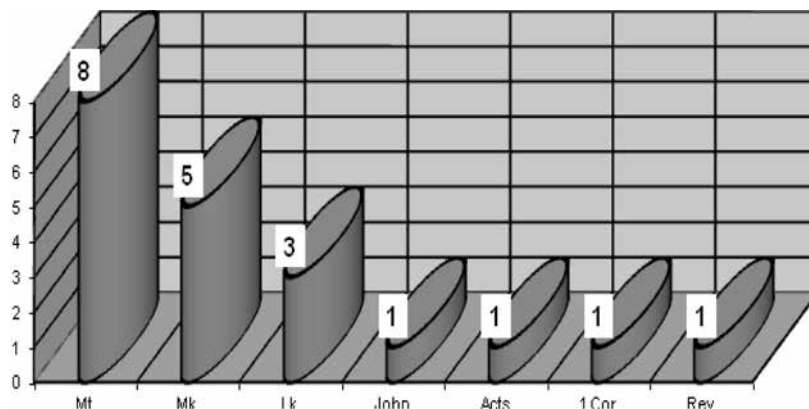


Chart 2: References to Jonah in the NT

2. Synoptic comparison

Synoptic reverences to Jonah's sign can be found in Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4; and Luke 11:29-32. An indefinite sign is mentioned in Mark 8:11-13; John 6:22-59 (especially v.30). In what follows, a comparison of the four synoptic texts is presented in order to improve our view of Matthew.

Probably the oldest text version is Lk 11:30. It does not give any hint for understanding the sign. It consists of a *καθώς-οὕτως* sentence which parallels Jonah with the Son of Man, and the men of Nineveh with this generation²⁴.

The two other text passages (Matt 12:38) differ from the Markan Vorlage inasmuch as some scribes²⁵ and Pharisees ask Jesus to give a sign (*θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἰδεῖν*). In contrast to Mark the motivation of Jesus' opponents is not mentioned. Furthermore, not a sign from heaven but a sign of Jesus is demanded.

In Mark just the Pharisees are Jesus' addressees, in Matthew some scribes and Pharisees (12:38), respectively Pharisees and Sadducees (16:1). Luke does not mention opponents, but indeterminate "others" from the crowds. The atmosphere is completely different. Whilst Mark and Matthew underline a dispute between Jesus and his opponents, Luke composes a scene with Jesus teaching the crowds. A motivation for asking is just not mentioned in Matt 12:38; whilst Mk 8:11; Matt 16:1 and Luke 11:16 speak about testing Jesus (*πειράζω*).

²⁴ Cf. U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 8-17)*, (EKK.NT, I/2), Zürich-Braunschweig, Benziger-Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 2(1996), pp. 278.

²⁵ A. Sand, *Matthäus*, p. 266 argues that the scribes are mentioned because of the OT quotation.

Chart 3: Synoptic Comparison

Aspects	Mark	Matt	Luke
Jesus' opponents	8:11 οἱ Φαρισαῖοι	12:38 τινες τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων 16:1 οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι	11:16 ἕτεροι
Motivation	8:11 ἤρξαντο συζητεῖν αὐτῷ ... πειράζοντες αὐτόν	12:38 nihil 16:1 πειράζοντες ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτόν	11:16 πειράζοντες
Sign	8:11 ζητοῦντες παρ' αὐτοῦ σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ	12:38 θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἰδεῖν 16:1 σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπιδείξει αὐτοῖς	11:16 σημεῖον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐξήτουν παρ' αὐτοῦ
Jesus' reaction	8:12 καὶ ἀναστενάξας τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ λέγει· τί ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ζητεῖ σημεῖον; ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον.	12:39 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου. 40 ὡσπερ γὰρ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας, οὕτως ἔσται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας. 41 ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινούσιν αὐτήν, ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὤδε. 16:3 τὰ δὲ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν οὐ δύνασθε 4 γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ. καὶ καταλιπὼν αὐτοὺς ἀπῆλθεν.	11:17 αὐτοὺς δὲ εἰδὼς αὐτῶν τὰ διανοήματα εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πᾶσα βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν διαμερισθεῖσα ἐρημοῦται καὶ οἶκος ἐπὶ οἶκον πίπτει.

The kind of sign is an extraordinary sign from heaven (Mark 8:11; Matt 16:1; Luke 11:16) or a sign from Jesus (Matt 12:38). Jesus' interpretation of Jonah's sign differs among the three Synoptics. Whilst in Mark Jesus refuses to give a sign at all, Matt 12:38 mentions the prophet Jonah. In Matt 16:1-4 the sign of Jonah remains an enigma for Jesus' audience that is able to interpret the appearance of the sky but not the signs of the time. Luke 11:29f portrays the contemporary generation as evil. It only receives the sign of Jonah.

Luke 11:29-32 is a close parallel to Matt 12:38; Jonah is understood as a sign that leads to the repentance in Nineveh – a parallel to the queen of the South and to Jesus. Thus, the sign of Jonah compares Jesus with this prophet. Matt 16:1-4 contains a singular idea in the NT insofar as the sign of Jonah is compared with the time signals.

The demand for a sign in John 6:30 has a completely different connotation as it points to Moses. The only parallel to Matt 12:38 is the demand for a sign from Jesus (τί οὖν ποιεῖς σὺ σημεῖον, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμέν σοι;). Instead of Jonah the sign of bread is introduced.

The most detailed reference to the Book of Jonah can be found in Matt 12:38-41 where Jonah is not only used to pronounce the result of the judgment for the contemporary generation but also to allude to Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the only direct anticipation to the death and resurrection that refers to the narrative of Jonah.

IV. Meaning of Jonah's sign in Matt 12:38-42 and 16:1-4

Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4

12:38a Τότε ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ τινες τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων

- b λέγοντες·
- c διδάσκαλε,
- d θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἰδεῖν.

39a ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·

b γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, (→ 16:4a)

c καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ (→ 16:4b)

d εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου. (→ 16,4c)

40a ὡσπερ γὰρ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας,

b οὕτως ἔσται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας.

41a ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν,

c ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ,

d καὶ ἰδοὺ

e πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὧδε.

42a βασιλίσσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης

b καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν,

c ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομῶνος,

d καὶ ἰδοὺ

e πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε.

16:1a Καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι

b πειράζοντες

c ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτὸν σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

d ἐπιδειξάι αὐτοῖς.

2a ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·

b [ὀψίας γενομένης

c λέγετε·

d εὐδία,

e πυρράζει γὰρ ὁ οὐρανός·

3a καὶ πρωΐ·

b σήμερον χειμῶν,

c πυρράζει γὰρ στυγνάζων ὁ οὐρανός.

d τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ γινώσκετε διακρίνειν,

e τὰ δὲ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν οὐ δύνασθε·]

4a γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, (→ 12:39b)

b καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ (→ 12:39c)

c εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ. (→ 12:39d)

c καὶ καταλιπὼν αὐτοὺς

d ἀπῆλθεν.

1. Context and composition

The sign of Jonah is placed in the context of a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. Matt 12:1-16:12 is a textual unit that takes place outside from Galilee. A kind of refrain runs through it: Three times it is told that Jesus withdrew from a place (12:15; 14:13; 15:21). Matt 13:1-53 is the third of Jesus' five major discourses in the Gospel. It forms a block within the unit 12:1-16:12 and is framed by two narrative blocks (12:1-50; 14:1-16:12) which both begin with the same phrase (Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ²⁶). Furthermore, in this part Jesus tries to avoid the conflicts with the Pharisees (12:2.14.24.38; 15:1.12; 16:1.6.11-12). He calls them an evil and adulterous generation (12:39.45; 16:4), criticizes their words (12:25-45), their traditions (15:1-20), and their doctrine (16:1-12). Nevertheless, he continues to heal the sick (12:9-14:15.22; 14:14.35-36; 15:21-28.30-31).

Three arguments support the unit Matt 14:1-16:12: 1., the use of the semantic field of food; 2., the numerous crossings over the sea (14:13.22-34; 15:39; 16:5); 3., the two flash-backs in 16:1-12 (16:9: feeding of the five thousand in 14:13-21; 16:10: feeding of the four thousand in 15:29-39).

Hence, the unit Matt 12:1-16:12 has a concentric structure with Jesus' discourse of the parables in the centre, framed by two short sequences (12:46-50; 13:53-58) and 12:1-45; 14:1-16:12. The sign of Jonah can be found in the frame (A-A').

- A 12:1-45: Jesus' controversies with the Pharisees
- B 12:46-50: Jesus' family
- C 13:1-52: Discourse of the parables
- B' 13:53-58: Jesus' family
- A' 14:1-16:12: Jesus' controversies with the Pharisees

The sign of Jonah is introduced in v.40 in form of a synonym parallelism and a ὡςπερ-οὕτως sentence in 12:40a (protasis) and 12:40b (apodosis):

Chart 4: Parallels between v.40a and v.40b

Parallels	v.40a: protasis	v.40b: apodosis
conjunction	ὡςπερ γάρ	οὕτως
verb (tempus)	ἦν (past)	ἔσται (future)
Subject	Ἰωνᾶς	ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
Location	ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους	ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς
Time	τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας	τῆς γῆς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας

The future (ἔσται) of the Son of Man is compared with the past (imperfect ἦν) of Jonah. The locations are comparable insofar both are in the depth of something: either in a belly of a fish or in the heart of the earth (ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους/ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς). The time of three days and nights is identical. As the action of the Son of Man will be in the future, its meaning is not (yet) determined. The comparison between Jonah and Son of Man functions as an anticipation and prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection in Mat-

²⁶ The phrase only occurs in Matt 11:25; 12:1 and 14:1.

thew's gospel. In fact it is a vaticinium ex eventu as the gospel was written after Jesus' death and resurrection.

In v.40 Jesus prophecies his death and resurrection with the comparison to the Jonah story: His death is **explicitly** expressed with the time of three days and nights and the location of the heart of the earth. The idea of his resurrection is **implicitly** expressed by the rescue of Jonah (2:11) and the use of the Christological title "Son of Man". Apart from the daily life of the Son of Man, Matthew underlines two characteristic aspects: the suffering and the judging Son of Man. Thus, the future tense (ἔσται), the subject (Son of Man), and the biblical idea of rescue after three days point to the idea of resurrection. Whilst God rescued Jonah after three days and nights in the belly of the fish, he will rescue his Son after three days and nights in the heart of the earth.

Further parallel structures can be detected in vv.41-42:

Chart 5: Parallels between v.41 and v.42

v.41	v.42
a ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης	a βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης
b καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν,	b καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν,
c ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνα	c ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομῶνος,
d καὶ ἰδοὺ	d καὶ ἰδοὺ
e πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὧδε.	e πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε.

The men of Nineveh are compared with the queen of the South (1 Kings 10:1-13). The men of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching and the queen of South heard Solomon's wisdom, but the contemporary generation did not repent at Jesus' preaching. Therefore, both (the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South) will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. The Jesus event is characterised as something greater than Jonah respectively Solomon. The two sayings contrast the OT positive response to God with the negative response to Jesus.

men of Niniveh → repent at Jonah's preaching → arise at judgment
 queen of South → hear Solomon's wisdom → arise at judgment

The connection of Jonah with the queen of the South and the judgment by Jonah's addressees is singular in the entire Jewish-Christian writings. It occurs only in Matt 12:39-41 and Luke 11:29-32.

Two different interpretations of the sign of Jonah are closely connected in Matt 12:40-42. On the one hand the divine rescue of Jonah after having been swallowed by the fish as an answer to the Matthean community, on the other hand the judgment as an appropriate response to Jesus' opponents. Matt 12:40-42 is part of the longer unit 12:1-16:12 in which conflicts with the Pharisees (12:2.14.24.38; 15:1.12; 16:1.6.11-12) and the healing of the sick (12:9-14:15.22; 14:14.35-36; 15:21-28.30-31) are the two major topics. The two aspects of the sign of Jonah (rescue, judgment) respond to the two different addressees: Rescue is promised to the sick; judgment is announced to Jesus' opponents.

Both text segments (12:39-42 // 16:1-4) are not merely linked in terms of semantics but also frame the segment 12:43-15:39 in form of a chiasm. The two texts are typical Matthean „duplicates” that frame a longer part of Matthew’s gospel. The text segments framed by 12:39-42 and 16:1-4 are a mixture of narratives, parables, miracles and Jesus’ sayings.

Chart 6: Comparison of the duplicates

Aspect	12:38-42	16:1-4
addressees	38 Τότε ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ τινες τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων λέγοντες·	1 Καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι πειράζοντες ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτὸν σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπιδειῖξαι αὐτοῖς.
request for a sign	διδάσκαλε, θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἰδεῖν.	σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπιδειῖξαι αὐτοῖς.
evil and adulterous generation	39 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ,	
sign of Jonah	καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου.	
allegory Jonah – Son of Man	40 ὡς περ γὰρ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας, οὕτως ἔσται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας.	
	41 ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης	42 βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης
	καὶ κατακρινούσιν αὐτήν,	καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν,
	ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ,	ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομῶνος.
	καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὧδε.	καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε.
examples from daily life		2 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· [ὅψιας γενομένης λέγετε· εὐδία, πυρράζει γὰρ ὁ οὐρανός
		3 καὶ προῖ σήμερον χειμῶν, πυρράζει γὰρ στουγνάζων ὁ οὐρανός.
		τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ γινώσκετε διακρίνειν, τὰ δὲ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν οὐ δύνασθε·]
		4 γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ,
evil and adulterous generation		
sign of Jonah		καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ.
Jesus’ departure		καὶ καταλιπὼν αὐτοὺς ἀπῆλθεν.

Apart from the parallels, the variations in Matt 16:1-4 are most interesting. Only Matt 12:38-42 indicates a meaning of the sign of Jonah, the second text (Matt 16:1-4) keeps silent about it. Both text segments contain the following four elements: 1. addressees; 2. request for a sign; 3. portrayal of the current generation; 4. sign of Jonah. Matt 12:38-42 is longer than 16:1-4 because the Jonah-Jesus-typology is left out in vv.40-42. The second text amends examples from daily life after the request for a sign.

The sign of Jonah is connected with Jonah's stay in the belly of the fish in Matt 12:38-42. The second text (Matt 16:3) links it with the signs of the times (τὰ δὲ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν). This expression comes from the OT creation narrative and late deuterocanonical wisdom theology (Gen 1:14; Wis 8:8; Sir 43:6). The appearances of the sky are understood as signs to detect the καιρός. Jesus' reproaches his opponents for just looking at the surface of things and for being unable to understand the deeper meaning of the sign. The major difference between the two texts is the interpretation of the Jonah sign. Either it is incorporated into a typology which portrays Jesus as greater than the prophet Jonah, or it is part of Jesus' prophetic criticism at the misinterpretation of signs by the current generation. In any case, the sign of Jonah functions as part of Matthew's Christology and his penitential sermon for his community.

2. Jesus' addressees

Jesus addressees in 12:38 are some of the scribes and Pharisees. The combination of both groups is characteristic for Matthew's gospel (5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2.13.15.23.25.27.29), especially in chapter 23. Only in 12:38 Matthew distinguishes and speaks about τινες τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων.

In Matt 16:1 Pharisees and Sadducees are mentioned as addressees. This combination just occurs in Matt 3:7; 16:1.6.11-12; 22:34 (and in Acts 23:6-8). The Pharisees have a hidden agenda while asking Jesus for a sign.

The addressees are portrayed in a very negative way: 1. morally corrupt, evil (πονηρός) and adulterous (μοιχαλίζ)²⁷; 2. the men of Nineveh will condemn this generation as they did not repent at Jesus' preaching; 3. the queen of the South will condemn this generation as they did not hear the wisdom of Jesus. Thus, the addressees are criticized for not repenting and not listening to the wisdom of Jesus.

On the level of the narrative both text segments are addressed to Jesus' opponents. As the gospel is written for a community the enemies of the Matthean church are meant.

3. Motivation for demanding a sign

The first text segment does not explicitly mention a motivation. The context is a mixture of healings, exorcisms and conflict stories. Therefore we can doubt that their intentions were honourable. 16:1 reveals the intention explicitly: Pharisees and Sadducees are tempting Jesus.

²⁷ This means in a real sense sexual misbehaviour and in metaphorical sense unfaithfulness in relation to God.

Compared with other conflict stories it can be expected that Jesus' answer will be most diplomatic and cautious. He is careful not to be manipulated by his opponents. Therefore he answers with a riddle which is difficult to understand.

Whilst his opponents expect him executing a supernatural sign that authorises him as the Messiah he answers with a riddle that does not fulfil their expectations. Both are talking at cross purposes. A misunderstanding of the sign of Jonah is intended in Matthew's gospel.

4. Understanding of σημεῖον in Matt

Jesus' speech opens with the enigma of Jonah's sign:

39a *An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign;*

b *but no sign shall be given to it*

c *except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

The meaning of this sign²⁸ is discussed among scholars. Three opinions predominate among scholars²⁹:

a) John the Baptist is the sign of Jonah as the name Jonah is the abbreviation of John and as Jesus proclaimed the Baptist as the Elijah redivivus³⁰. This assumption is quite uncertain and not convincing.

b) Older exegetical publications favour the idea that Jonah's sign is identical with his penitential sermon. This hypothesis is not convincing since σημεῖον belongs to the semantic field of non-verbal communication. It indicates an event with a special meaning³¹. The Greek word for "sign", σημεῖον, occurs in the following semantic fields: In Mark's Gospel the Pharisees argue with Jesus and demand a sign from heaven (8:11 σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) in order to attempt him. Jesus refuses to give a sign (v.12) in order not to be manipulated by his enemies. Matt 16:1 is the closest parallel to Mark 8:11. The Pharisees along with the Sadducees – an addition of Matthew – and their motivation (tempting Jesus) are mentioned just as the sign of heaven.

In John's gospel the miracles (possibly including the resurrection) are called σημεῖον, in the synoptic tradition they are called δόναμις. Furthermore, σημεῖον is never linked with a sermon but always with a (visible) divine intervention or confirmation of divine

²⁸ σημεῖον occurs 9 times in Matt: 12:38.39(3); 16:1.3.4(3); 24:3.24.30; 26:48. Three references are to be found in the apocalyptic speech (24:3.24.30); they are closely connected with the two text segments (12:38.39[3]; 16:1.3.4[3]) on the sign of Jonah. The last one is the betrayer's sign. In short: σημεῖον indicates non-verbal communication and signals eschatological aspects.

²⁹ In terms of grammar the expression τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου can be understood as a genitivus appositivus / epxegeticus (Jonah is the sign himself) or as a genitivus subiectivus (a sign done by Jonah), or as genitivus obiectivus (sign visible at Jonah). Cf. LUZ, *Matthäus*, pp. 278-280; K. Huber, *Zeichen*, pp. 82-86.

³⁰ Cf. U.-K. Plisch, *Was ist „das Zeichen des Jona“?*, in H.-G. Bethge – S. Emmel – K.L. King – I. Schletterer (eds.), *For the Children, Perfect Instruction: Studies in Honor of Hans-Martin Schenke on the Occasion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften's Thirties Year* (Nag Hammadi Studies, 54), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2002, pp. 399-409, p. 408: „Aus den angeführten Möglichkeiten ergibt sich [...] die Möglichkeit, [...] einen Verweis Jesu auf seinen Zeitgenossen Johannes und dessen Bußpredigt zu erblicken“.

³¹ Cf. J.P. Louw – E.A. Nida, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains. 2 Volumes*, New York, NY, United Bible Societies, 3(1989).

salvation (e.g. a sign of covenant as the miracles of the Exodus). The term σημεῖον very often is connected with τέρας (46 out of 197 reverences of σημεῖον in the Greek Bible). Even the few prophetic writings that use σημεῖον (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Ezekiel) understand it in this way. The OT signs only rarely refer to supernatural or miraculous dimensions. Quite the reverse, they serve to confirm an action of the word of God.

Matthew uses σημεῖον thirteen times (12:38.39[3x]; 16:1.3.4[3x]; 24:3.24.30; 26:48), nine times in the context of the sign of Jonah. Apart from these references, σημεῖον is used in the eschatological discourse to indicate the very end of times (24:3.24.30). Furthermore, σημεῖον is used for the kiss of Judas (26:48). Although σημεῖον has a future aspect in Matthew's gospel, it does not necessarily have a supernatural dimension.

c) The most persuading theory is that Jonah's rescue from the fish is regarded as a sign in Matt 12:38. Jesus' speech continues in Matt 12:40 with a tertium comparationis³²:

40a For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish,

b so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The motifs of the Son of Man, a Christological title, the duration of three days and nights, and the stay in the belly of the fish or rather in the heart of the earth with Jonah are comparable. The expression ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς is singular in the entire Bible. As it is another image it is difficult to use it for the interpretation of the belly of the fish.

Chart 7: Jonah – Son of Man

Jonah	Son of Man
three days and three nights	three days and three nights
in the belly of the fish	In the heart of the earth

A clear determination of the genitive τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου is impossible. It grammatically can be interpreted as a genitivus appositivus / expegeticus (Jonah **is** the sign himself), or as a genitivus subiectivus (a sign **done** by Jonah), or as genitivus obiectivus (sign visible at Jonah). The sign of Jonah can be interpreted in two different ways: 1., Jesus himself is the sign. 2., Jesus' preaching repentance is the sign.

5. Meaning of three days and three nights

The time of three days and three nights³³ is common in biblical writings. It stands for a crisis and/or a change after a crisis.

The expression τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας/τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας only occurs three times in the OT and once in the NT (as a rewriting of Jonah). The idea is

³² Cf. J. Jeremias, Ἰωνᾶς, pp. 410-413.

³³ Cf. K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift: Früheste Christologie, Bekenntnisbildung und Schriftauslegung im Lichte von 1 Kor. 15, 3-5* (QD, 38), Freiburg, Herder, 2(1969) (= digital version edited by M. Kinnen – A. Raffelt 2004).

either applied to eating and drinking in 1 Sam 30:12 (“And when he had eaten, his spirit revived; for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.”) and Esth 4:16 (“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day.”) or connected with being in the belly of the fish in Jonah 2:1 and Matt 12:40. It seems to imply that the duration of three days and three nights involves a decision on death or life. In particular, 1 Sam 30:12 emphasizes restoration after this period.

Three days are mentioned more often in the Bible³⁴. They are connected with a journey through the desert/wilderness; stay in Jerusalem; encounter with God; plagues; repentance; succession; riddle; and war event.³⁵

In the NT the duration of three days has other connotations. Both miracles of feeding the crowds take place on the third day (Matt 15:32; Mark 8:2). Finding the twelve year old Jesus in the temple also takes place on the third day (Luke 2:46). This narrative is closely connected with the walk to Emmaus (24:1.13). The eucharist and Jesus’ resurrection are always connected with the third day – not after three days³⁶. Three days mean a turning point after a crisis (cf. Acts 9:9)³⁷.

There might be a close connection between Matt 12:38-42 to the temple word of Jesus in John 2:20 that might elucidate Jonah’s sign:

³⁴ Gen 30:36 (journey of three days); 40:12.13.18.19; 42:17 (Joseph: dream interpretation); Exod 3:18 (journey of three days); 5:3 (journey of three days); 8:23 (journey of three days); 10:22.23 (plague: darkness); 15:22 (journey in the desert without water); 19:15 (preparation for the encounter with YHWH); Num 10:33 (journey with the ark of the covenant); 33:8 (journey in the desert); Josh 1:11 (passing the Jordan within 3 days); 2:16.22 (spies sent to Jericho); 3:2 (Israel crossing the Jordan); 9:16 (covenant after 3 days); 14:14 (riddle); 19:4 (Levite’s concubine); 2 Sam 20:4 (rebellion of Sheba); 2 Sam 24:13 (three days of pestilence); 1 Kings 12:5 (northern tribes secede); 2 Kings 2:17 (Elisha succeeds Elijah); 1 Chr 12:39 (David’s army in Hebron); 21:12 (pestilence); 10:5 (revolt); 20:25 (plunder); Ezra 8:15 (camp); 8:32 (3 days in Jerusalem); 8:41 (leaders return); 10:8.9 (assembly in Jerusalem within 3 days); Neh 2:11 (Nehemia in Jerusalem); Jdt 2:21 (journey); 12:7 (Judith in the camp); 1 Macc 5:24 (journey through the wilderness); 10:34 (no taxes for Jews 3 days for and after a feast); 2 Macc 5:14 (destruction of inhabitants); 13:12 (weeping and fasting); Jonah 2:1 (fish); 3:3 (3 days journey through Nineveh); 3:4 LXX (three days until the destruction of Nineveh).

³⁵ Journey (Gen 30:36; Exod 3:18; 5:3; 8:23; 15:22; Num 10:33; 33:8; Jdt 2:21; 1 Macc 5:24; Jonah 3:3); crossing the Jordan, sending of spies (Josh 1:11; 3:2; 2:16.22); staying in Jerusalem (Ezra 8:32; 10:8.9; Neh 2:11; 1 Chr 12:39); encountering with YHWH, covenant (Exod 19:15; Josh 9:16); plagues (10:22.23: darkness; 21:12: pestilence; 2 Sam 24:13: pestilence); repentance (2 Macc 13:12: weeping and fasting; Jonah 3:4 LXX); succession (2 Kings 2:17); riddle / dream (Gen 40:12.13.18.19; 42:17; Josh 14:14); war (2 Sam 20:4; 1 Kings 12:5; 1 Chr 10:5; 20:25; Ezra 8:15; 8:41; Jdt 12:7).

³⁶ A. Sand, *Matthäus*, p. 267 concludes that the sign of Jonah is applied to Jesus’ burial.

³⁷ Cf. N.H. Young, *The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament: A Response*, in *NovT* 45 (2003) 111-122, pp. 120-121, points to the vague time references.

Chart 8: Comparison Matt 12:38-40 – John 2:18-22

Matt 12:38-40	John 2:20
38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." (διδάσκαλε, θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἰδεῖν.) 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.	18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" (τί σημεῖον δευκνύεις ἡμῖν ὅτι ταῦτα ποιεῖς;) 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he spoke of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Both text segments contain scenes that reflect on a conflict between Jesus and his opponents (Matthew: scribes and Pharisees; John: Jews) demanding a sign from Jesus. A second parallel is the negative assessment of Jesus' addressees by the narrators (Matt 12:39: γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλῖς; John: misunderstanding in v.20). The most significant agreement is the time of three days in combination with the stay in the fish (Jonah) and with the temple (John). Both texts do not only mention the three days but also indicate the meaning of it:

Chart 9: Idea of resurrection Matthew – John

Aspect	Matt	John
Image	Jonah: 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish	3 days for destructing the temple 3 days for reconstructing the temple
Interpretation	Jesus: 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth	Jesus = temple
Meaning	Resurrection	Resurrection

Both texts interpret the duration of three days likewise. Both images (fish, temple) are used to express destruction and reconstruction, which are also crucial in Jesus' life (passion, resurrection). The riddle in John 2:20 can illuminate the understanding of Matt 12:38-42.

6. Jonah and the Son of Man

Matt 12:41-42 is a characteristic Matthean saying about the Son of Man. The Christological title Son of Man is preferred in Matthew's gospel (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8.32.40; 13:37.41; 16:13; 16:27.28; 17:9.12.22; 19:28; 20:18.28; 24:27.30.37.39.44; 25:31; 26:2; 26:24.45.64). Three different topics are connected with the title: suffering (12:40; 17:9; 20:18.28; 26:2.45), judging (10:23; 12:32; 13:41; 16:27.28; 19:28; 24:27.30.37.39.44; 25:31; 26:24.64), and the daily life of the Son of Man (8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8; 13:37; 16:13). Most of the titles are connected with Jesus' role in the final judgment.

The saying in 12:40 is assigned to two categories: to the suffering Son of Man and the judging Son of Man. The Jesus' prediction about the sign of Jonah in Matt 12:40 connects two aspects with each other: On the one hand hope for resurrection; and on the other hand

the final judgment for those who do not believe in the Son of Man. Both theologoumena belong together as they deal with the redemption of men.

Summary

The questions we dealt with were: What did Matthew mean with the sign of Jonah? Did Matt understand it in terms of resurrection? And if so, did he follow examples of the past? Why did he mention the sign of Jonah in this particular context of his composition?

Jonah is quoted by Matthew's Jesus to criticize the idea of an available God who gives a sign from heaven as expected. Just as the book of Jonah condemns doctrinal theology the two text segments Matt 12:38-42 and 16:1-4 reveal unrealistic expectations of Jesus' opponents. Jesus' answer exceeds all expectations in regard to a sign from heaven and to God. A supernatural visible miracle is not the response, but the hope for a faithful God and for the final resurrection. The sign of God given by Jesus is a criticism against fixed theological doctrines.

The sign of Jonah will remain an enigma in Matthew's gospel. The fact that it cannot be unequivocally solved is a component of Matthew's theology and narrative. Preconditions to understand the sign of Jonah in terms of Jesus' death and resurrection are repentance and belief. Jesus' opponents demand a sign and expect a supra-natural sign. They were confronted with a riddle which could be understood by his followers, respectively the Matthean community. It necessarily must be misunderstood by Jesus' enemies and the community's opponents as they had other expectations and a hidden agenda. Furthermore, it might reflect a conflict within the Matthean community: Jews reject Jesus whilst Gentiles follow him (mission to Israel in 10:6; 15:24 – but universal mission: 28:16-20). The sign of Jonah is directed to this particular and difficult situation of the Matthean community and their opponents.

In the context of the sign of Jonah Matthew develops a Jonah-Jesus-typology³⁸ and a Solomon-Jesus-typology: Jesus is greater than the two of them. Both are regarded as precedents for Jesus' death and resurrection, his penitential sermon and his wisdom. Furthermore, the OT figures contrast the positive response of Israel with the negative response of Jesus' opponents. Insofar the controversy story presents answers to the Jewish-Christian community of Matthew.

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³⁸ Cf. D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP, 1), Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press 2(2007).

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Summary

The article deals with particular texts that are not limited to the resurrection narratives in Matt 28. In what follows we will have a close look at Matthew's understanding of Jonah's sign. What did he mean with the sign of Jonah? Did Matthew understand it in terms of resurrection? And if so, did he follow examples of the past? Why did he mention the sign of Jonah in this particular context of his composition?

Keywords: Jonah, rewritten Bible, OT and Jewish literature, syn comparison, resurrection, σημεῖον, Son of Man

Streszczenie

ZNACZENIE I FUNKCJA ZNAKU JONASZA W EWANGELII ŚW. MATEUSZA 12:38-42 I 16:1-4

Artykuł dotyczy poszczególnych tekstów, które nie są ograniczone jedynie do opisu zmartwychwstania w Ewangelii wg św. Mateusza 28. W dalszej części zobaczymy, jak św. Mateusz rozumie znak Jonasza. Co miał na myśli, mówiąc o znaku Jonasza? Czy rozumiał, że chodzi o zmartwychwstanie? A jeśli tak, to czy podążał za przykładami z przeszłości? Dlaczego wspominał o znaku Jonasza w tym konkretnym kontekście?

Słowa kluczowe: Jonasz, ponownie napisana Biblia, Stary Testament i literatura żydowska, porównania, zmartwychwstanie, σημεῖον, Syn Człowieczy