

Item #14 (Some Signs of God in the Synoptics)

This was Entry #4 in my previous website, “James Swetnam’s Close Readings”. There it was entitled “Matthew 12,39/16,4 and Luke 11,29”.

Two years after publishing a note “No Sign of Jonah” about Mark 8,12 (§111). I published another note “Some Signs of Jonah” (§126). The article about Mark maintained that Mark deliberately omitted Jesus’ reference to the giving of a sign by God so that he himself could give the sign in witness to his own trustworthiness in his interrogation before the Sanhedrin when he answers the high priest that he is indeed the Messiah, the son of God. In Matthew and Luke, of course, there is explicit mention of the “sign of Jonah”. In reliance on the ambiguity inherent in the genitive case in Greek I take the phrase “sign of Jonah” in Matthew and Luke as meaning two different realities. (But have since decided that they are really the same. See below.)

In Matthew I emphasize the mention of “prophet” which is distinctive of Matthew, and argue that this indicates that Matthew in turn was emphasizing the prophetic role of Jesus in indicating that a sign would be given, and this prophetic sign was the destruction of the Jerusalem, temple and city. That is to say, the genitive “of Jonah” is possessive. The prophecy of the destruction of temple and city “belonged” to Jesus as the prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh “belonged” to Jonah.

In Luke, on the other hand, I take the genitive “of Jonah” to be epeexegetic. That is to say, Jonah himself (i.e., Jesus himself) is the sign which will be given. And it will be given at the resurrection: the risen Jesus is the testimony given by God to the truth of all that Jesus said and did.

The argumentation given here still seems valid, though I am not as convinced about the interpretation given of the texts in Matthew and Luke as I am of the text in Mark. But perhaps further reflection by me or by someone else can either strengthen the plausibility of my interpretation given in §111 and §126 or show decisively that it is implausible. (**25 March 2008**)

I now think the “sign” in Matthew is the same as the “sign” in Luke, i.e., the risen Jesus himself (cf. all the attention paid to legal witness involving the resurrection), with the resurrection acting as a sign anticipating the sign of the destruction of the Temple. (**4 July 2019**). Further reflection has convinced me that the resurrection of Jesus is the most plausible interpretation of the “sign of Jonah”. Thus the “sign” is the same in Matthew and in Luke. The relevance of this “sign” for the destruction of the Temple would depend on the date assigned for the composition of Matthew’s Gospel. I opt for a date in the middle of the

first century. For at Matthew 22,7 and 24,2 there are two prophecies of Jesus about the destruction of the Temple, with no indication that they have been fulfilled. Hence the probability is against the resurrection being used in connection with the destruction of the Temple: Jesus original hearers would not be expected to be alive for this destruction. **(10 July 2017; 4 July 2019)**