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Sign - The Last Generation That Needed Signs



By Dan Maines

The Last Generation That Needed Signs

Introduction

† Signs in Scripture were never random displays of power meant to entertain or convince believers.

† They were covenantal warnings aimed at a specific people living under a specific covenant.

† Once that covenant reached its appointed end, the need for signs ended with it.

Matthew 12:38-42

Matthew 12:38

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

† The request for a sign came from covenant leaders who already rejected Jesus.

† This wasn't honest doubt, it was covenant rebellion.

† Signs were demanded by those accountable to the Law, not by believers.

Matthew 12:39

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves a sign; and so no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet;

† Jesus identified the sign seekers as an adulterous generation, prophetic covenant language.

† Adultery here refers to covenant unfaithfulness, not merely moral failure.

† Signs were limited to that generation, proving they weren't perpetual.

Matthew 12:40

for just as JONAH WAS IN THE STOMACH OF THE SEA MONSTER FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

† The sign given was redemptive, not ongoing miraculous displays.

† Christ's death and resurrection marked the covenant transition point.

† After this sign, judgment on that covenant generation was certain.

Matthew 12:41

The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

† Gentiles repented without signs, Israel demanded signs and still refused.

† Signs didn't produce faith, they exposed rebellion.

† Accountability increased with greater revelation.

Matthew 12:42

The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

† Wisdom was sufficient for the Queen of Sheba.

† Israel rejected greater light while demanding proof.

† Signs functioned as judicial testimony, not evangelistic tools.

1 Corinthians 1:22

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;

† Paul described an active covenant distinction, not a timeless rule.

† Sign seeking identified Old Covenant Israel.

† When the covenant ended, that identifying marker ended with it.

Hebrews 2:3-4

Hebrews 2:3

how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

- † The warning was directed to a living covenant generation.
- † Confirmation was temporary and foundational.
- † Judgment language shows urgency tied to covenant transition.

Hebrews 2:4

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

- † Signs bore witness, they weren't the message.
- † Bearing witness indicates a completed function.
- † Once the covenant shift was complete, the witness was no longer required.

Deuteronomy 28:46

And they will become a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever.

- † Signs in the Law were covenant curses.
- † They functioned as warnings of judgment for disobedience.
- † Jesus and the apostles operated within this covenant framework.

Deuteronomy 4:34

Or has a god ventured to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, just as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

- † Signs were tied to covenant formation, not ongoing religious experience.
- † They marked Israel as a distinct covenant nation.
- † When that covenant ended, the signs tied to it ended as well.

Isaiah 28:16-21

Isaiah 28:16

Therefore this is what the Lord GOD says:

"Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
A precious cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
The one who believes in it will not be disturbed.

- † Christ is presented as the true foundation, not signs.
- † Faith rests on the cornerstone, not on visible wonders.
- † This directly opposes sign seeking as a basis for belief.

Isaiah 28:17

I will make justice the measuring line
And righteousness the level;
Then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
And the waters will overflow the secret place.

- † Judgment language dominates the context of signs.
- † Signs expose false refuge rather than produce saving faith.
- † Covenant breakers are being measured and removed.

Isaiah 28:18

- † Covenant language is explicit, not generic.
- † This points to covenant annulment, not ongoing warning cycles.
- † Signs accompany covenant collapse, not covenant continuation.

Isaiah 28:19

As often as it passes through, it will seize you;
For morning after morning it will pass through, anytime during
the day or night,
And it will be sheer terror to understand what it means."

- † The message brings terror, not reassurance.
- † Signs function as judgment messengers.
- † Understanding comes through judgment, not spectacle.

Isaiah 28:20

The bed is too short on which to stretch out,
And the blanket is too small to wrap oneself in.

- † False security is exposed.
- † Signs reveal insufficiency of covenant refuge.
- † There's no rest for covenant breakers.

Isaiah 28:21

For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim,
He will be stirred up as in the Valley of Gibeon,
To do His task, His unusual task,
And to work His work, His extraordinary work.

- † Judgment is called God's strange work, yet necessary.
- † Signs accompany this strange work, not normal covenant life.
- † Once the work is finished, the signs cease.

Isaiah 8:18

Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for
signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of armies, who
dwells on Mount Zion.

- † Signs are explicitly tied to Israel, not the nations.
- † They belong to a covenant people under judgment and warning.
- † This confines signs to a specific covenant context.

1 Corinthians 14:21-22

1 Corinthians 14:21

In the Law it is written: "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY
THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND

EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.

† Paul quotes covenant judgment language from Isaiah.

† Tongues are linked to warning a disobedient people.

† Even signs don't guarantee repentance.

1 Corinthians 14:22

So then, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe.

† Scripture explicitly states signs aren't for believers.

† This confirms the covenant breaker focus of signs.

† Once the covenant ended, the sign function ended.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded signs in Jerusalem before its destruction, confirming covenant judgment.

† Eusebius stated apostolic signs confirmed the gospel's initial spread.

† Augustine taught miracles established the church, not sustained it.

† Tacitus confirmed the devastation of Jerusalem from a Roman historical perspective, supporting the finality of covenant judgment.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need signs because the covenant transition is complete.

† Faith rests on Christ's finished work, not warning signs.

† Seeking signs today misunderstands their original covenant purpose.

Q & A Appendix

Q Why did signs stop after the first century?

A Because their covenant purpose was fulfilled when the Old Covenant ended, Matthew 12:39-40; Hebrews 2:3-4.

Q Were signs meant to build faith in believers?

A No, they were aimed at covenant breakers, 1 Corinthians 1:22; Deuteronomy 28:46.

Q Does the absence of signs mean God is inactive today?

A No, it means redemption is complete and final, Hebrews 1:1-2.

Q Should Christians expect signs today like in Acts?

A No. Acts records covenant transition, not a perpetual pattern, Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:22.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Matthew 12:38-42; 1 Corinthians 1:22; Hebrews 2:3-4; Deuteronomy 28:46; Deuteronomy 4:34; Isaiah 28:16-21; Isaiah 8:18; 1 Corinthians 14:21-22

† 1 Corinthians 13:8-10

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3

† Augustine, City of God, Book 22

† Tacitus, Histories, Book 5

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