

Matthew 12:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

Analysis

'Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.' Despite witnessing countless miracles, scribes and Pharisees demand 'a sign' (σημεῖον/sēmeion)—validating miracle. The word 'Master' (Διδάσκαλε/Didaskale, teacher) feigns respect while hearts remain hostile. Reformed theology recognizes this pattern: unbelief demands more evidence while rejecting already-given evidence. They'd witnessed healings, exorcisms, nature miracles—yet want additional sign. This demonstrates problem isn't insufficient evidence but hardened hearts. Jesus's response (v.39-40) rebukes them: only sign they'll receive is Jonah's sign (death and resurrection). The request reveals several errors:

1. Demanding God prove Himself on their terms
2. Ignoring already-given evidence
3. Assuming more evidence would produce faith when hearts are hardened.

The pattern continues: skeptics demand proof while dismissing existing evidence. Faith doesn't come from irrefutable proof but from humble receptivity to available evidence.

Historical Context

Scribes and Pharisees represented religious establishment—trained in Torah, respected as authorities. Their demand for sign echoes Israel's wilderness pattern: despite witnessing plagues, Red Sea crossing, manna, cloud/fire, they repeatedly

demanded signs (Exodus 17:2-7, Numbers 14:11, 22). Jesus had already performed numerous miracles throughout Galilee: healings, exorcisms, feeding multitudes, nature miracles. Yet they wanted different kind of sign—perhaps celestial phenomenon (Joshua's long day, Hezekiah's sundial reversal) or unmistakable divine voice. Their demand was both unbelieving (rejecting existing evidence) and presumptuous (dictating terms to God). Similar pattern appears in John 6:30: after feeding 5000, crowd asks 'What sign shewest thou?' Jesus identifies this as evil generation (v.39)—characterizing entire attitude as wicked. Early church faced similar demands: pagans wanted spectacular proof; gnostics demanded special knowledge. But gospel centers on cross and resurrection—offensive to human pride, requiring humble faith. Throughout history, apologetics provides reasons for faith, but no amount of evidence compels belief without Spirit's work.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. When do legitimate questions about faith become illegitimate demands for God to prove Himself on your terms?
2. Why doesn't more evidence automatically produce faith—what's the relationship between evidence and belief?
3. How do you respond when skeptics dismiss existing evidence while demanding different kinds of proof?

Interlinear Text

Τότε ἀπεκρίθησαν τινες τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων
Then answered certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees
G5119 G611 G5100 G3588 G1122 G2532 G5330

λέγοντες Διδάσκαλε θέλομεν ἀπὸ σοῦ σημεῖον ἵδειν
saying Master we would from thee a sign see
G3004 G1320 G2309 G575 G4675 G4592 G1492

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 1:22 (Parallel theme): For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

John 2:18 (Parallel theme): Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

Luke 11:16 (Parallel theme): And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.

John 4:48 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

Luke 11:29 (Parallel theme): And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.

John 6:30 (Parallel theme): They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?