

Matthew 12:41

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Analysis

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment (οἱ ἄνδρες Νινευῖται, hoi andres Nineuitai)—Jesus invokes the pagan sailors who repented at Jonah's reluctant preaching (Jonah 3). The verb metanoeō (μετανοέω, 'they repented') means fundamental reorientation, not mere regret.

A greater than Jonas is here (πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὡδε, pleion Iōna hōde)—The Greek pleion is neuter, meaning 'something greater,' emphasizing not just personal superiority but the superiority of Christ's mission, message, and authority. Jonah brought temporal deliverance; Christ brings eternal salvation. The Ninevites' response to a minor prophet condemns Israel's rejection of the Messiah himself.

Historical Context

Spoken during Jesus's Galilean ministry (AD 28-30) after Pharisees demanded a sign. Nineveh's repentance under Jonah (c. 760 BC) was legendary in Jewish tradition, making the contrast with first-century Israel's hardness even more damning.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. If pagan Ninevites repented at lesser revelation, what does your response to Christ's full gospel reveal about your heart?
2. How does Jesus's 'greater than Jonah' claim challenge modern attempts to reduce him to merely a good teacher or prophet?

Interlinear Text

ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ^{G3588}
The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with^{G2920}
G435 G3536 G450 G1722 G3326

τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν, ὅτι^{G3754}
G3588 generation and shall condemn it because^{G846}
G1074 G3778 G2532 G2632 G3754

μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ καὶ οἴδού, πλεῖον^{G4119}
they repented at the preaching Jonas and behold a greater than^{G2400}
G3340 G1519 G3588 G2782 G2495 G2532 G2400 G4119

Ἰωνᾶ ὕδε^{G5602}
Jonas is here^{G2495}

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 12:42 (Judgment): The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Hebrews 11:7 (Parallel theme): By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Jeremiah 3:11 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

Romans 2:27 (Judgment): And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

Matthew 12:6 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

John 3:31 (Parallel theme): He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

Jonah 1:2 (Resurrection): Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

Isaiah 54:17 (Judgment): No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Matthew 23:36 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Matthew 16:4 (Parallel theme): A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

