



Episode 53 – Understanding the Signs: Unveiling the Scriptures in Matthew 16

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In this episode of DTG Ministries, Scott Stanley dives into the book of Revelation and shifts focus to explore the profound importance of the scriptures in uncovering truth. Highlighting Matthew 16, Scott examines Jesus's interaction with the Pharisees and Sadducees, who sought a sign to prove His Messiahship. Through this passage, Scott unravels the layers of meaning behind Jesus' words, questioning why He called them hypocrites and what the 'sign of the prophet Jonah' truly signifies.

Scott emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the scriptures, encouraging listeners to discern the spiritual signs of the times, much like recognizing the signs of a season. He elaborates on the symbolic nature of the sun, moon, and stars in Genesis 1, drawing parallels to the spiritual understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. Through the testimony of John the Baptist and prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi, Scott underscores the importance of seeking God's truth in the Bible to truly comprehend the signs of the times.

This episode challenges listeners to move beyond literal interpretations and seek a spiritual understanding of the scriptures, revealing how the Bible offers a profound insight into the time of Messiah and the significance of Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate sign. Join Scott in this enlightening discussion as he encourages a deeper exploration of the Bible to discern the divine truths that guide us today.

Modified Transcript:

Scriptures are transcribed directly with notations. Refer to KJV for verbatim wording.

Hi. This is Scott Stanley with DTG Ministries, and we're continuing our podcast on the Book of Revelation. Today, I'm going to shift gears and change things up a little bit. I want to talk about the importance of the scriptures. I know that for me in my life, the scriptures are the most important thing to me because the Lord is able to use the scriptures to reveal truth. I'm able to pray, seek the Lord, find truth, discover truth, and have revelations of truth through the scriptures, and I know that's by God's design. That is what He would have us all do. So, I want to turn to Matthew 16, starting at verse 1.

Mat 16:1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.

Mat 16:2 He answered and said unto them, When it's evening, you say, it will be fair weather for the sky is red.

Mat 16:3 And in the morning, it will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky; but you can't discern the signs of the times?

Mat 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them and departed.

Now, this series of verses is loaded, and we could talk about this for days. There is a lot of background we need to have to fully understand what he's talking about. I've got to say this: When I read things like this and start discovering the background, it just amazes me at the understanding Jesus Christ had. I mean, I know he's Jesus Christ; He's the Son of the living God. But what he knew was just breathtaking, to approach Pharisees and Sadducees, to approach people carrying the understanding he had. It is my prayer that we can all be more like him, getting our truth from the scriptures.

But there are three things in this that I've got a question. The first thing is, why does he call them hypocrites because they can't discern the signs of the times? They're a hypocrite: *You can discern the face of the sky, but not the signs of the times*, so you're a hypocrite. The other thing is, what in the world does he mean by "*a wicked and adulterous generation seeks a sign*," because that is what I see all around me... everybody is seeking a sign. So, there's something here, a piece to this puzzle that I need to understand better. The third thing is, what in the world does the sign of the prophet Jonah have to do with it, because that is described in Matthew 12:39.

Mat 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah:
Mat 12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

So, how does that fit into what he is saying here? Well, the sign of the prophet Jonah, the three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, plays into the signs of the times, what he says in verse 3, "*You can discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.*" How does that fit into Jonah and the three days and three nights? Well, first of all, let me say that the word "time," *signs of the times*, is a set time, signs of a set time.

An example would be a set time, let's say it's Christmas. That's a set time. So, what are the signs that you're nearing Christmas? Now, you know, I hate to make this secular, but it's just a way that I can understand it. If I say, well, how do I know I'm getting close to Christmas? Well, the weather, and you see all the Christmas lights and commercials on TV, and everybody's trying to sell you this, that, and the other, and carolers, you know- Merry Christmas. All this going on- those are signs of the time of Christmas.

Well, what time do you think he is talking about when they say in Matthew 16:1, "*We want you to show us a sign*"? They were asking to see a sign that he was Messiah- "*Give us a sign.*" It's interesting to me in Matthew 15, for instance, verses 30 and 31:

Mat 15:30 And great multitudes came to him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them,

Mat 15:31 As much that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, and the maimed whole, and the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

Then, you go a little further down in chapter 15, he has the seven loaves and a few fish, and he feeds the people and has food left over. These were miracles, but they were signs. Then, for the Sadducees to say, "*Well, show us a sign,*" they're hypocritical to do that. It's like they're ignoring what is going on. And they want to see a sign- *give us a sign, do a sign for us.* So he says, "*You hypocrites.*" But there's another reason he called them hypocrites. And that is the main reason I want to do this podcast today. This is what I want to talk about. What in the world does the sign of the prophet Jonah have to do with anything, or that they can discern the signs of the sky, but not discern the signs of the times?

Well, "*signs of the times*" go back to Genesis 1, and I'm getting ready to show you why they were hypocrites, why any of us are hypocrites looking for an outward sign. You've got to have a sign to see what's going on ... "What time of the world do we live in? Well, I've got to see a sign out there." Well, here is why they were hypocrites. Genesis, chapter 1, is about the creation of the church. This is not the literal creation of the world; it's the creation of the church. I know this because, on the sixth day, he puts all things under our feet, which Paul says in Hebrews, chapter 2, has not happened yet (Heb 2:8).

He says in 1 Corinthians 15, when all things are put under our feet, he delivers up the kingdom. So, for all things to be put under your feet means you've overcome all iniquity. And when I'm looking at Genesis 1, like I say, Hebrews 2 says, "*We see not yet all things put under us, but we see Jesus*" (Heb 2:8, 9). So the sixth day, *when He puts all things under your feet*, has not happened yet. But I'm looking now at Genesis 1, and I see, on day one, God separates the light from the dark. On day two, he puts "*a firmament in the midst of the waters, let it divide the waters from the waters,*" that's Genesis 1:6. So there are two groupings of water, and water is a symbol of understanding. So, verse 6:

Gen 1:6 ... a firmament in the midst of the waters, dividing the water from the waters.

Gen 1:7 God made a firmament and divided the waters under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and it was so.

So I've got a heavenly water and an earthly water. Earthly water, earthly understanding will kill you. You need to be in your heavens to understand God's water. You enter into the heavens to do that.

Gen 1:8 God called this firmament, this expansion, Heaven. And the evening and morning were the second day.

So here, he makes a firmament separating the water from the water, and he calls that firmament heaven. Therefore, when I go to verse 14,

Gen 1:14 God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven...

There's another way of saying that. Let there be lights in the heavens of the heavens. Here is your heaven of heaven; this is where it comes from. And the lights in the heavens divide day from night. Now remember Genesis 1:6, the firmament, the heavens, he divides water from water. But in verse 14, the lights that he puts in the heavens divide day from night. So again, Genesis 1:14,

Gen 1:14 God said, Let there be lights in the heavens of the heavens to divide the day from night; (But here is the rest of it.) Let these lights be for signs and seasons...

That "season" is [4150], and it can be a set time, a set place, but it's the same as what we read in Matthew 16, for "*signs of seasons*," in the lights that he put in the heaven, verse 16:

Gen 1:16 He made two great lights; the greater light is to rule the day, the lesser light rules the night; and he made the stars too.

So we know we're talking about the sun, the moon, and the stars. The sun is a symbol of the Son (the s-u-n is a symbol of the s-o-n), and the moon is a symbol of the scriptures themselves. The moon has no light except the sun shine on it. So here you have, in the heavens of the heavens, he puts the sun and the moon and the stars for signs and seasons. Now it's beginning to add up to me that what I'm reading in Matthew 16, they can discern the face of the literal sky, but when it comes to the spiritual sun, moon, and stars, they're not looking at that; they can't understand that.

The point is that there was enough truth being given about Jesus Christ that they could have discerned who he was, and they wouldn't have had the problem of rejecting him. God sent a fellow by the name of John the Baptist to walk and preach before Christ came. There is a prophecy in Isaiah 40 about John the Baptist. Verse 3.

Isa 40:3 The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isa 40:4 Every valley is going to be exalted, all the mountains and hills (all the doctrines), are going to be made low: what's crooked is going to be made straight, and the rough places will be made plain:

Isa 40:5 And the glory of Jehovah will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it.

That's one prophecy. There's another prophecy about John the Baptist. This one is in Malachi 3:1.

Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Now, what makes this significant is that these prophecies were understood by some. Look at Mark, chapter 1.

Mar 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

Mar 1:2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. (What's he quoting? We just read it- Malachi 3. Now Mark 1:3.)

Mar 1:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.

Mar 1:4 John did baptize in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin.

So they understood- this is John the Baptist. They began to understand that he was sent by God. Look at the Gospel of John, chapter 5, starting at verse 31. Jesus says:

Jhn 5:31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness isn't true.

Jhn 5:32 There's another that bears witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesses of me is true.

Jhn 5:33 You sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.

Jhn 5:34 But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that you might be saved.

I've always found that verse interesting, that he sends them to John. *"You know, John was bearing witness of me. Now, I don't receive testimony from men, but I know what he was saying is true. That's why I'm saying, look at what John said."*

Joh 5:35 He was a burning and shining light: and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

So, when John came and said what he was saying, they believed it. They began to believe, and the importance of what John was doing was pointing people to a spiritual understanding of the scripture. See, there are times we'll read the Bible, and we read it literally because that's how we think, and we just don't understand it until somebody comes along and puts the spiritual meaning to it, and then, "Oh, yeah, now I see what that is." Well, that's what John was doing. To see that, turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 1. I want to start reading at verse 19.

Jhn 1:19 This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?

Jhn 1:20 And he confessed, and he denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

Jhn 1:21 And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, No, I'm not.

Jhn 1:22 Well, are you that prophet of Deuteronomy 18? He said, No. And they said then, Well, who are you that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What do you say of yourself?

Jhn 1:23 And he said (I am Isaiah 40, verse 3), I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. See, he was telling them this. *Make straight the way of the Lord*, as said the prophet Isaiah.

Jhn 1:24 And they which were sent of the Pharisees

Jhn 1:25 ... asked him and said, Well, why are you immersing, then, if you're not the Christ, or Elijah, or the prophet?

Jhn 1:26 And John said, I'm immersing you with water, but there's one standing among you, whom you know not.

Jhn 1:27 He it is, who coming after me, is preferred or came to be before me, whose shoe's latchet I'm not worthy to unloose.

Jhn 1:28 These things came to be in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was immersing.

Jhn 1:29 The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and he says, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

Jhn 1:30 This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man which came to be before me, for he was before me.

Jhn 1:31 And I didn't know him: but that he should be made manifest to Israel. That's why I have come immersing with water.

Jhn 1:32 John bear record, he said, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and then abode upon him,

Jhn 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water said, Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is he which immerses in Holy Spirit.

Jhn 1:34 And I saw, and I bear record this is the Son of God.

Why is that key? Because they were told that, and Jesus said, *"For a time you received this. For a time, you believed this. You believed the message John was giving."* John was pointing them to the s-o-n symbolized in the s-u-n. See, the sign of the time. What is the time? This is the time of Messiah- Messiah's coming. What's a sign of that? John says, "Well, God told me that I'm to baptize, and I will see the Holy Spirit come down on somebody, and I'm telling you, I saw this happen. It's him, it's this guy. He will baptize you in Holy Spirit. You know what? This is the Son of God. You know what else? He's the Lamb of God." He was giving them the Elijah message.

Now, if these guys were into their Bibles, into the Scripture, studying it, learning it, seeking God for truth, they would have seen this. They would have understood this, and they would have understood spiritually, because that is how God teaches you, spiritually.

But they were not seeking God's understanding in the Bible, and for a time, they rejoiced in what John said about Jesus. But Jesus says, *"Well, you guys, you're looking for a sign. Well, you're a hypocrite. You're discerning the literal sky, but when it comes to the sun, the moon, and the stars that are in the heavens, you're not discerning that, and the only way you're going to discern that is with the Bible itself. If you guys were in the scripture, you wouldn't be looking for a sign, you would be seeing signs all over the place,"* because he was doing things that only Messiah would do.

He was born in Bethlehem. That's why the gospels were written- so we can connect Jesus to the Messiah of the Old Testament. These things were being understood by people, and the Pharisees rejoiced in John's message. But when they heard Jesus' message, they rejected him because he wasn't fulfilling what they thought Messiah would be. Why? Because they weren't studying the scriptures. They didn't understand what Messiah was going to do.

The fact that John the Baptist said, *"He is the Lamb which takes away the sin of the world,"* points to the fact that Jesus was going to replace the animal sacrifices. This was John the Baptist's message: He is the Son of God. He's Messiah. He is the Lamb of God, and he called him one other thing. There's another testimony that John gave about Christ, and this is in John, chapter 3. I want to start reading at verse 25.

Jhn 3:25 There arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying,

Jhn 3:26 And they came to John, and they said, Rabbi, he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bear witness, behold, he's baptizing, and everybody's going to him,

Jhn 3:27 And John said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (In other words, God is leading in this.)

Jhn 3:28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I told you, I'm not the Christ, but I am sent before him.

Jhn 3:29 He that has the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this is fulfilling my joy.

So he not only said, *"He's the Lamb, he is the Son of God,"* but *"He is the bridegroom."* This testimony was being given for everybody in the land who wanted to hear it. I'm telling you right now, if somebody were studying their Bible, seeking the Lord for understanding, they would have readily understood Jesus is the guy. This is the guy.

They would have understood what John was talking about when he gave them the Elijah message. But the Pharisees and Sadducees were not studying the Bible. They were studying and learning, concentrating on what other rabbis said about it.

Therefore, they received the message of John, but then they turned to Jesus, and they said, "*Well, give us a sign.*" Well, a guy is standing over there, John, who said, "*God told me I'll see the Holy Spirit come down, and I did. I saw it. This is the Son of God. This is the Lamb of God. This is the bridegroom.*" But they wouldn't believe it. Their scriptures would bear it out. What do you mean, the bridegroom? Psalms 19, I want to start reading at verse 1.

Psa 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork.

Do I need to read that again? The heavens declare the glory of God. Literal, yep, spiritual, oh yeah.

Psa 19:2 Day unto day, utters speech, night into night, shows knowledge.

Psa 19:3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Psa 19:4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun,

Psa 19:5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race.

Psa 19:6 His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it: there is nothing hid from the heat of it.

Now here you see, the s-u-n is the bridegroom, and in Isaiah 62, speaking of Jerusalem, verse 5,

Isa 62:5 As a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you: as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The bridegroom is God. If you simply go back to Isaiah 54, this whole chapter is about New Jerusalem, or the Jerusalem God created when he gave you a new heaven and a new earth. Notice in Isaiah 54:5, "*Your Maker is your husband,*" that's God the Father. "*Jehovah of hosts is his name.*" And when I read that, "*Your Maker is your husband, the one who made you,*" that's the Father; it's His Holy Spirit that we receive. Well, what do you mean by "it's your husband"?

All of us are married to our spirit. You're married to your spirit, and I've got to tell you this- as long as the man is alive, the woman is bound to that man. The woman is your emotional side or your spirit. But if you can find death, God will resurrect you, allowing you to be married to the spirit of the risen Savior. The law binds the man and the woman together until one of them dies. You find death on the cross, and you marry the risen Savior and receive the Holy Spirit of God, a righteous woman. So, back to Isaiah 54:5,

Isa 54:5 Your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; Jehovah of hosts; and the one who redeems you is the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Again, I'm just telling you that all of this information was in the Bible. So when they sought him looking for a sign, it was obvious they weren't reading their Bibles. They weren't taking the time to understand it and seek the Lord's understanding of it. They were in complete darkness, hence, the sign of the prophet Jonah, *"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Mat 12:40). If you look at Genesis, it's on the fourth day that the sun, the moon, and the stars were put in place. That means for three and a half days, they didn't understand the sun. The sun was in the heart of their earth, spiritually speaking. They did not discern Messiah. Their understanding of Messiah was in the heart of the earth. They had their own thoughts of it, not God's understanding of it.

At the end of three and a half days (remember a day is from evening to morning) ... three and a half days: In the morning, the sun, the moon, and the stars were put in place. That's the only sign God was giving them, that this is the time of Messiah. That sign was his resurrection. When he was raised from the dead, he was declared to be the Son of God. The only sign he gave them, although the scriptures were full of signs, they were hypocrites.

The lesson I get from this is that if I'm going to look, knowing I'm at the end of the world, and if I want to understand the sign of the times, I get it from the Bible. I don't make up my own signs. "Well, this is happening, that is happening... It's got to be the end." See, I can't do that. I've got to take it from scripture, and the scripture is the most important thing in my life, the truth, and having God lead me in it.