

Jewish Leaders Demand a Sign from Heaven

It was rare for the Pharisees and Sadducees to be united, especially in a cooperative effort like confronting Jesus. In most of the New Testament, the two groups are portrayed as having **significant theological and political differences**, even opposition. That's what makes their joint appearance in **Matthew 16:1** noteworthy:

"And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven." (ESV)

Why This Is Unusual

Group	Pharisees	Sadducees
Beliefs	Accepted entire Tanakh and Oral Law	Accepted only the Torah (first 5 books)
Resurrection	Believed in resurrection, angels, spirits	Denied all of these
Power Base	Popular with the people, local synagogues	Aristocratic, tied to the Temple and priesthood
Political Stance	More separatist and religiously rigorous	More cooperative with Roman rule
Typical Role	Teachers of the Law and interpreters	Temple authorities and aristocrats

So in normal times, **they opposed each other**. Yet here they **join forces against Jesus**, which strongly implies:

What This Tells Us

- **Jesus is seen as a threat to both parties** — He disrupts the religious control of the Pharisees and the political-religious power of the Sadducees.
- **Common enemies unite**: Their differences were temporarily set aside because they saw Jesus as challenging both the religious traditions and the Temple structure.
- **Echoes of Psalm 2:2** — “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed...”

Later, at Jesus' trial and crucifixion, **Pharisees and Sadducees (especially the chief priests, most of whom were Sadducees)** again unite in opposition. So Matthew 16 is an early preview of that alliance.

The common phrase:

"Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in morning, sailor's warning."

This directly connects to **Matthew 16:2–3 (ESV)**:

He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”

Explanation:

- Jesus is referencing a bit of common weather wisdom in that time (and still known today).
- The saying relies on how atmospheric conditions influence light at sunrise and sunset — a red sky at night often signals high pressure and good weather; red sky in the morning can mean an approaching storm system.

So, this well-known sailor's proverb mirrors exactly what Jesus says in Matthew 16:2–3 and is often cited as a modern echo of this Scripture.

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The “**sign of Jonah**” that Jesus refers to is explained in **two main ways** in the Gospels, and both point to **Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection**.

◆ The Key Passages

Matthew 12:39–40 (cf. Matthew 16:4)

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Luke 11:29–30

“This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.”

🔍 What is the Sign of Jonah?

Aspect	Jonah	Jesus
Time "in death"	In the fish for 3 days and 3 nights (Jonah 1:17)	In the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights
Emerges alive	Vomited out alive (Jonah 2:10)	Raised from the dead
Preaches to Gentiles	Preached repentance to Nineveh	Gospel later goes to Gentiles
Response	Nineveh repented	Mixed in Jesus' day
Becomes a sign	Jonah himself became a "living sign" of God's mercy and judgment	Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate sign of divine authority

🧠 Key Meaning:

The "sign of Jonah" = Jesus' resurrection.

Just like Jonah seemingly returned from death and brought a message of repentance, so too Jesus would **triumph over death**, validating His message and authority.

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Mark 8:14–21 and Matthew 16:5–12, where the “leftovers” connect with His warning about the **Pharisees and Herod**. Let’s break this down:



The Two Feedings Recap

- **Feeding of the 5,000 (Jewish region):**
 - 5 loaves + 2 fish → 12 baskets leftover (symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel).
 - Message: Jesus provides more than enough for Israel.
- **Feeding of the 4,000 (Gentile region):**
 - 7 loaves + a few fish → 7 baskets leftover (7 = number of fullness/completion; also recalls the 7 Gentile nations of Canaan in Deut 7:1).
 - Message: Jesus provides more than enough for the nations.



The Warning: “Beware the leaven...”

Right after these feedings, the disciples get into a boat with **only one loaf of bread** (MK 8:14).

- Jesus warns: “*Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod*” (MK 8:15).
- Matthew phrases it: “*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees*” (MT 16:6).
- The disciples think He’s scolding them about not bringing enough bread.

But Jesus reminds them of the **leftovers**:

- “*When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets did you pick up? ... And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets did you pick up?*”
- Then He asks: “*Do you still not understand?*” (MK 8:19–21).



The Meaning

1. **The Leftovers = Abundant Provision**
 - 12 baskets (Israel) + 7 baskets (nations) = symbolic fullness.
 - Jesus is enough for both Jews and Gentiles — His provision is limitless.
2. **Pharisees and Herod = Corrupt Leaven**
 - Pharisees’ “leaven”: Hypocrisy, legalism, spiritual blindness (MT 23:27).
 - Herod’s “leaven”: Worldly power, corruption, unbelief (MK 6:14–29 — Herod killed John the Baptist).
 - Both groups failed to “remember” God’s provision; they demanded signs (MK 8:11–13).
3. **Contrast:**
 - The disciples are worrying about *one loaf* → scarcity thinking.
 - Jesus points to the leftovers → *abundance that never runs out*.
 - The warning: Don’t adopt the mindset of the Pharisees (religious pride) or Herod (political power). Their “yeast” will blind you to God’s provision already shown.



Theological Takeaway

- The **leftovers** were tangible proof that Jesus supplies beyond need.
- The **Pharisees and Herod** represent unbelief, corruption, and spiritual dullness — the exact opposite of trusting in Christ’s sufficiency.
- Jesus is saying: “*Don’t let their unbelief infect you. Remember the baskets. Remember My sufficiency.*”

👉 In short:

The baskets of leftovers show Jesus’ overflowing provision for both **Israel (12)** and the **nations (7)**, while the Pharisees and Herod symbolize the corrupt “yeast” of unbelief that blinds people from recognizing that provision.