

“Why does this generation ask for a sign?”

A. Intro: *Proofs*

B. Sermon in a Sentence: *Believing is seeing.*

C. Context & Meaning of Mark 8:11-13

Following his extended teaching and miraculous feeding of thousands of Gentile faith pilgrims, Jesus crosses over by boat to the area near Magdala, on the southwestern shore of Galilee. The disciples' preconceptions about who is eligible to partake of the Bread of Life is steadily being stretched. The Kingdom is expanding before their eyes, and though it would have been easy to remain among the spiritually hungry, Jesus is on a mission led by the Spirit. He has an appointment on the far side of the lake with his future executioners.

As Jesus steps ashore, the Pharisees lay in wait with what is now a test repeated from earlier in his ministry in which they challenged Jesus to perform a sign on demand to prove his legitimacy. This time, they sarcastically request a “*sign from heaven*” since he has supposedly already produced miraculous meals like their sentimental hero Moses. The difference is that Jesus sees beyond the daily provision of bread toward a time when only those who partake of his lifeblood will be at the feast of God (John 6).

To the Pharisees, Jesus is a dangerous heretic who must be stopped at all costs. No matter that he's been leaving in his wake a cascade of other miracles - raising the dead, healing crippling conditions, AND multiplying manna-like bread from thin air. “We want another sign RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE!” they seem to demand. Jesus knows their faithlessness cannot be appeased by mere signs, and points (in the Matthew 16 parallel version) to Jonah's 3-day catch and release story as the “signpost” they are missing.

We too want “proof” and naively think that this will be enough to foster faith in us. One more miracle. One more request granted supernaturally. We don't believe others' experiences, but want our own to digest, like a taste tester vying for a Costco sample before we'll switch brands.

Why does every generation ask for a sign from God? Is the falling rain, the food we eat, the love we feel, the breath we take, the fragrance of life, the music we hear, the Word open before us, not enough? We expect the sea to part, the sun to stop in the sky, the pain to leave quickly before its work of warning and guiding us is done. We want a sign because we want what we want, not what God wants. He has given us enough to believe, to flourish, to love him and to love others, and to have his mission direct us each day.

D. TODAY'S BIBLE PASSAGES

Matthew 12:38-40 (NIV) ³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” ³⁹ He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matthew 16:1-4 (NIV) ¹ The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ ³ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

Mark 8:11-13 (NIV) ¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.” ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

E. Why do we ask for signs?

1. We don't recognize or trust in Jesus as Lord.
2. We overlook the signs we've already been given.
3. We think coming to faith happens on our terms, instead of God's.

F. Why does Jesus "sigh deeply" in this incident?

Jesus is grieving at the calloused **pride** which blocks humanity's ability to see his grace. Like a parent who both patiently endures and anguishes over a prodigal child, Jesus' sigh is God's expression of love and pain over the deadly consequences of spiritual stubbornness.

LIFE APPLICATION STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If you are a believer in Jesus, how did he use or not use signs and miracles in the process of helping you to follow him as Savior and Lord?
2. How do you react to the statement – **God tends to use signs among the already humble in heart.**
3. If you are still a spiritual seeker, write out your greatest objections to trusting in Jesus and then try an experiment. Humble yourself before God by asking him to either respond, refute, or remove your objections through showing you his truth in the Word and in the Spirit. Remain open each day to how God may be talking to you through the bible, experiences, people, and other insights.
4. In this time of the virus affecting so many levels of our society, what signs are you seeing from God that he is still overseeing our lives and direction? How has he been encouraging you?
5. Who do you know who is spiritually blind to God's goodness? Spend this week praying for them daily, then give them a call and listen to how God may have been at work in their lives.

Question: "Does God exist?"

(from Got Questions web site)

Answer: Whether God exists is the most important question any person can consider. Opinions on God are everywhere, but answering the question **does God exist?** demands more than a few seconds of attention and involves a wide range of ideas and evidence. Ultimately, what we see in human experience, science, logic, and history leads to a confident answer: yes, God exists.

Often, this question is posed as "Can you prove God exists?" The problem is that, while truth itself is absolute, there are virtually zero instances of absolute proof outside of pure logic and mathematics. Courtrooms don't require absolute proof, for that reason; rather, they seek to dispel "reasonable doubt" and consider what's "most probable."

It's equally flawed to demand "proof of God" that no person could ever reject. Neither

evidence nor people function that way in the real world. "Encountering" facts and "accepting" them are profoundly different. Airtight, sound arguments are still "unconvincing" to those determined to disbelieve. For that person, it's not "proof," even if it would convince almost anyone else. A person's intent is more influential than any evidence encountered.

That means "faith" is necessary—and not just regarding God's existence. Perfect knowledge is beyond our ability. Bias and prejudice cloud our views. There will always be a gap between what we can "know" and what we "believe." This applies equally across the spectrum from skeptics to believers. We cannot possibly know every detail involved every time we sit in a chair, eat food, or climb stairs. Such actions all express a measure of faith. We act, despite what we don't know, because of what we do know. That's the essence of biblical faith, including faith in the existence of God. We trust

in what is known, leading us to action, despite a less-than-absolute understanding (Hebrews 11:6).

Whether or not one acknowledges God, the decision involves faith. Belief in God does not require blind faith (John 20:29), but neither can it overcome malicious resistance (John 5:39–40). What is fair is to point to human experience, logic, and empirical evidence to inform the answer.

Does God exist? – Human Experience

Discussing the existence of God usually starts with logical arguments. That makes sense, but it's not how human beings normally operate. No one starts devoid of all perspective, waiting to follow a robotically rational path before forming an opinion. People interpret life based on the world around them. So looking at the existence of God ought to start with experiences. Afterwards, we can use logic to assess those views.

Evidence of God exists in daily human experiences (Romans 1:19–20; Psalm 19:1; Ecclesiastes 3:11). This includes our innate sense of morality. It applies to the apparent design of the universe around us. Human life compels belief that truth, deception, love, hate, goodness, evil, etc., are real and meaningful. The overwhelming majority of people throughout history were inclined to believe in a reality greater than the physical.

Those experiences are not conclusive, of course. Instead, God uses general revelation as an invitation (Revelation 3:20). Common experiences are meant to emphasize that we ought to seek further answers (Matthew 7:7–8). Those who ignore or disdain that invitation don't have the excuse of being ignorant (Romans 1:18; Psalm 14:1).

Does God exist? – Human Logic

Three of the more powerful logical suggestions of God's existence are the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments.

The cosmological argument considers the principle of cause and effect. Each effect is the result of some cause, and each cause is the effect of a prior cause. However, that chain of causes cannot go on infinitely into the past, or else the chain would never actually start. Logic demands something eternally existent and not itself the effect of anything else. Our universe, clearly, is not eternal or uncaused. Logic points to God: the uncreated, eternal measure of all other things, the First Cause of our reality.

The teleological argument examines the structure of the universe. The largest galactic scales, our solar system, our DNA, subatomic particles—everything gives the appearance of having been purposefully arranged. This trait is so strong that even hardened atheists are constantly fumbling to explain away the appearance of design.

Nothing about subatomic particles or forces indicates they must be arranged the way they are. Yet, if they were not exactly as they are, complex matter—and life—would be impossible. Dozens of universal constants coordinate with mind-boggling precision just to make life possible, let alone actual. Science has never observed or explained life arising from non-life, yet it also shows a sudden onset of complex organisms. Archaeologists who see the words I am here on a cave wall would universally assume intelligent action.

Meanwhile, human DNA represents a coding structure beyond the ability of the best human engineers. The weight of this evidence, logically, favors the idea of an Intelligent Designer—God—as an explanation.

The moral argument takes note of concepts like good and evil, ethics, and so forth. It's notable that these are discussions of "what should be," not merely "what is." Moral principles are drastically disconnected from the ruthless, selfish reasoning that one would expect of a creature randomly evolved to survive at any cost. The very idea that human

beings think in non-physical, moral terms is striking. Beyond that, the fundamental content of human morals across cultures and history is identical.

Further, discussion of moral ideas leads inevitably to a crossroads. Either moral ideas are completely subjective, and therefore meaningless, or they must be grounded in some unchanging standard. Human experience doesn't support the conclusion that morals mean nothing. The most reasonable explanation for why people think in moral terms and share moral ideals is a real moral law provided by a Moral Lawgiver, i.e., God.

Does God exist? – Human Science

The logical arguments above are inspired by observations. Concepts such as the Big Bang Theory demonstrate, at the very least, the scientific validity of a created, non-eternal universe. Likewise for the structure of DNA. Empirical data lends credibility to the idea of a biblical Creator and contradicts alternative explanations, such as an eternal universe or abiogenesis.

Archaeology also lends support to the Bible. People, events, and places depicted in Scripture have repeatedly been confirmed by secular discoveries. Many of these came after skeptics implied the Bible's accounts were fictional.

History and literature, for their part, also support the existence of God. The preservation of the Bible is one example. Tracing the existing text so closely to the original events makes it more reliable. Judeo-Christian influence on culture, morality, human rights, and the birth of modern science also strongly indicates an approach aligned with truth.

Does God exist? – God in Us

Each of the prior categories is an entire field of study and the subject of thousands of books. Yet the existence of God is demonstrated most

profoundly, for most people, in personal experience. It may be impossible to “prove” to others that you're happy, for instance, but that doesn't change the fact that you are. That's not to say internal perspective outweighs objective truth, but complex truths are often powerfully supported by individual experiences. Changed lives, reformed attitudes, and answers to prayer are all part of our personal perception that God exists.

A personal sense of truth is the most compelling way we know God exists, and it's God's intent for all people to experience that sense. God came to earth personally, as a human being (2 Corinthians 4:6), so we could have a personal relationship with Him (John 14:6). Those who sincerely seek God will find Him (Matthew 7:7–8), resulting in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26–27).

The question does God exist?, therefore, cannot demand an answer using absolute proof, but we can point people to where the weight of evidence leads. Accepting the existence of God is not a blind-faith leap into the dark. It's a trusting step out of the dark into a well-lit room where many things are made clear.

Recommended Resource: *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* by Norm Geisler and Frank Turek