

If I Be Lifted Up

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It was during his last six days of Jesus life, before the cross, that he made this statement: **Jn 12:32-33**: 32. *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* And John added: 33. *This he said, signifying what death he should die.* It seems pretty clear that these verses apply to Jesus' death on the cross. Notice five of at least seven references which contain statements made by Jesus several months before that last Passover, and final hours of his life:

- ▶ **Mt 16:21**: *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.* (Cp Mk 8:27, 31; Lk 9:10, 22)
- ▶ **Mt 17:22-24**: 22. *And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: 23. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.* (Cp Mk 9:30-32)
- ▶ **Lk 18:31-35**: 31. *Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. 32. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit upon: 33. And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.* (Cp Mk 10:32-34)
- ▶ **Mt 20:17-19**: 17. *And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, 18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, 19. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

For many weeks, Jesus kept repeating to his disciples about what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. He did not say his death might happen, nor did he say, if it should happen. It was a fact of prophecy that would absolutely be fulfilled. So, why did Jesus use the word "if" in John 12:32? Why would he indicate only a possibility after being so direct and positive of his death?

The key to understanding this verse is in Verse 33: *This he said, signifying what death he should die.* The word translated 'signifying' is the Greek word *semaino*⁽⁴⁵⁹¹⁾, which is a verb. The noun form is *semeion*⁽⁴⁵⁹²⁾ translated some 50 times as 'sign'. *Semeion* is used about 80% of the time for the Hebrew word *ot*⁽²²⁶⁾ in the Septuagint. In the Old Testament the rainbow (Gen 9:13 - token), circumcision (Gen 17:11; Rom 4:11) and the Sabbath (Ex 31:16-17) were signs, as were many other things in Israel's history. Signs should generate questions like, "What is it, what does it mean?" Literal stories are to be signs, symbols and allegories to teach the depth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (cf Gal 4:22-24)

Both the Hebrew and Greek carry the same meaning. The 'sign' is not the object on which to focus, but the insight taught by the sign. So to reference an object or event as being 'signified', means that it is to be viewed as something that gives instruction and understanding. **Num 14:11**: *And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shown among them?* God was continually giving signs to Israel to teach them about himself. The entire book of Revelation was 'signified' to John. In other words, the entire book is symbolic - full of signs given to instruct, or point to something to be revealed. **Rev 1:1**: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified⁽⁴⁵⁹¹⁾ it by his angel unto his servant John:*

Another interesting point that should be mentioned is that a 'sign' can either establish faith in the person, or harden their heart. The plagues on Egypt were signs God gave through Moses (Cf Ex 4:1-9), to teach Pharaoh and that he might know there was not another god like unto Yahweh. Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate only the first three signs. Notice what they told Pharaoh when they were unable to duplicate the fourth sign: **Ex 8:19**: *Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.* Ultimately, Pharaoh rejected all the signs.

Jn 12:33: *This he said, signifying what death he should die.* John is telling us that the death of Jesus on the cross is a sign. Every Christian knows the fact of his death. But how many have the correct understanding of why he died, and, what was accomplished? There are many signs to be considered around the crucifixion, like the crown of thorns, pulling of his beard, suffering in Gethsemane, being naked, the Father forsaking him, the purple robe, and several other signs which are to instruct mankind? Additionally, why would the Son of God be likened to a serpent? (Jn 3:14; Num 21:8-9)

Jesus said: *If I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* He already knew without a doubt that he would die, and generally what was to happen during the event. In this statement Jesus is emphasizing the need to understand the event. To lift the event up from the earth, is to look at it from the heavens - God's way of understanding. Thus we have the reason for the condition set by the word IF. Those refusing the instruction of the event WILL NOT be drawn to Christ, because they harden their own heart.

Some today use John 12:32 to prove that all will be saved. They say, or imply, that Jesus did die on the cross, therefore ALL will be saved. However, when word studies are done on the words all and world, they are found to be infrequently used in the Bible as inclusive of every individual in the whole world. Here are a few samples - you ask the Lord, then decide how they are used:

- **Mk 1:5:** *5. And there went out unto him (the Baptist) all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.*
- **Lk 7:29-30:** *29. And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. 30. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*
- **Jn 12:19:** *The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.*

Why would a person refuse the instruction of the cross? There are controversies and confusion involving the cross, such as 1) the human nature of Christ 2) the pre-existence of the Son 3) was he born or created in eternity past or 4) was Jesus The God in human form. Every individual needs to diligently seek God for an understanding of the cross and answers to these things. The Jewish leaders were condemned for adhering to, and teaching the traditions of man. Don't be caught doing the same today!

Conclusion: **Lk 11:29-30:** *29. 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. 30. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.* The men who threw Jonah into the sea and witnessed a big fish swallowing him, and the people on the beach who saw Jonah spit out of the fish's mouth were able to validate this unusual sign. As a result, the message of Johan was validated by the sign and the whole city repented. Jesus used the same sign like this: **Mt 12:40:** *For as Jonas 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.* The only sign that generation was to receive was Jesus' experience in Gethsemane and on the cross.

Today's generation is no less diligent in looking for signs of the return of the Christ. Some of the signs discussed are 1) the mark of the beast, Rev 13; 2) sun and moon darkened Mt 24; 3) wars and rumors of wars; 4) earthquakes, etc. Some are even looking for all the waters of the earth to be turned to blood, Rev 16:3-4. I do not think any of these will be literal signs, but signs that apply to the inward man. However, there are enough of the literal things so that people have somewhere to hang their doubts.

Jn 10:41: *And many came to him; and they said, "John did no sign (miracle in KJ), but everything that John said about this man was true." (Revised Standard) John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, and he did not perform nor give any signs. Most take the 4th chapter of Malachi to be speaking of the 2nd coming of Christ. If that is true, then we should expect the spirit of Elijah in a message of truth, but without signs - no sign but that given to an adulterous and evil generation - the passion of Jesus Christ.*

*And I, **IF** I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* May God's grace be your guide.