

Section 38

JESUS HEALS MANY IN DECAPOLIS AND FEEDS FOUR THOUSAND

(Parallel: Mark 7:31—8:9)

TEXT: 15:29-39

29 And Jesus departed then, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there. 30 And there came unto him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at his feet; and he healed them: 31 insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing: and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 And Jesus called unto him his disciples, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I would not send them away fasting, lest haply they faint on the way. 33 And the disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so many loaves in a desert place as to fill so great a multitude? 34 And Jesus said unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few small fishes. 35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; 36 and he took the seven loaves and the fishes; and he gave thanks and brake, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 37 And they all ate, and were filled: and they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces, seven baskets full. 38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And he sent away the multitudes, and entered into the boat, and came into the borders of Magadan.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think Jesus spends so much time outside of Palestine on this trip without even beginning a special ministry among Gentiles? How could Jesus, the Savior of the world, refuse to teach any part of the world's people? Yet, in this section, He obviously and deliberately intends to hide from the Gentiles in Phoenicia and Syria through which He travelled. How do you justify this omission?

- b. Earlier when Jesus went to the Decapolis and cast demons out of the Gadarene demoniacs, out of fear the countrymen of the demoniacs flatly asked Jesus to leave. Here, however, the people in this same area welcome Jesus joyfully. How do you account for this change in reception?
- c. Why does Matthew completely omit the mention of the healing of the deaf mute, as recorded by Mark? Or is there any evidence in Matthew that shows that he knew about it and just chose not to record it?
- d. Why do you think Jesus took the deaf mute aside for a more or less private healing? Why do you think Jesus used the method to heal the deaf mute that He did? Could He not have simply spoken a word to cure Him? Why all the pantomime? (See parallel in Mark.)
- e. How could Jesus hope for privacy and silence from the cured deaf mute, with more than four thousand people in the immediate vicinity? Does not His demand that the immediate friends or family of the man, as well as the man himself, not tell anyone seem rather futile, if not foolish, in view of the crowds? If Jesus is not doing something useless or stupid, then, what is the meaning or purpose of His charge to the healed that they should not tell anyone?
- f. Why did people stay with Jesus so long that they ran out of groceries? Had they not brought any along with them?
- g. Why had not the Apostles yet learned that Jesus has power to feed multitudes in a wilderness with only scant provisions? How many times must they see the evidence before they will be certain that Jesus can and will do it? How many times did you hear about Jesus' wonderful power before you were compelled to accept it as a matter of fact? If you feel that the Apostles were not unbelieving in His power, what evidences do you see in the text that indicate to you that they had really learned?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Soon after the incident involving the Syrophenician woman, Jesus traveled on north from the neighborhood of Tyre, passed through Sidon then turned eastward to the area east of the Sea of Galilee known as the Decapolis. Skirting the Sea of Galilee, He climbed up one of the hillsides and sat down.

Great crowds began to flock to Him, bringing with them their lame,

their crippled, their blind folk, those who could not hear, as well as many others. They lay them before Jesus at His feet and He healed them.

They brought Him, for instance, a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They requested Jesus to lay His hand on him to heal him. The Lord took the man aside, away from the crowd. Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears, spat and touched the man's tongue. Then, looking up into the sky, He sighed. Next He said to the man in Aramaic "Ephphatha," a word which means, "Be opened!"

With that he began to hear and, at the same time, the speech defect was removed and the man spoke normally. Jesus gave him and his friends strict instructions not to tell any one about this incident. But the more He forbade them, the more they broadcast it.

The crowd was absolutely amazed. They kept saying, "All that He does, He does well!" "Why He even makes the deaf people to hear again and the dumb speak." Consequently, the people were simply astonished at seeing the formerly dumb people speaking; the maimed now whole, the crippled walking naturally and the blind seeing. They gave the credit to the God of Israel.

During that same period of Jesus' Decapolis ministry, another huge crowd had gathered around Jesus, but they ran out of food. It was then that Jesus called His disciples over to Him to inform them, "I feel sorry for all these people, inasmuch as they have been with me three days now and are completely out of food. I am unwilling to send them away to their homes hungry; they might just not make it there. In fact, some of them have come a long distance."

"How and where can we find enough food in this forsaken place to feed all this crowd?" was the answer the disciples gave Him.

Jesus insisted; "How many loaves of bread do you have?"

"Seven," they counted, "and a few small fish."

Then Jesus told the people to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves of bread in His hands along with the fish and gave thanks for them. Next He broke them and distributed them to His followers for distribution to the crowd. Everybody ate all he wanted and still they collected seven hampers full of scraps left over. That day there were about four thousand men in the crowd that ate, not counting the women and children too.

After dismissing the multitudes of people to return home, Jesus Himself immediately boarded a boat with His men and sailed toward the area of Magadan-Dalmanutha.

SUMMARY

After casting the demon out of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, Jesus and the Twelve followed a round-about route to re-enter Palestine, concluding their journey in the Decapolis area east of the Sea of Galilee. Great crowds gathered around Him for healing. Three days they stayed, during which time Jesus healed a deaf and dumb man thus amazing the crowds who glorified Israel's God. When the food shortage became acute, Jesus miraculously fed at least four thousand men, not counting women and children, with only seven buns and some little fish. Then He and the Twelve sailed southwest to Magadan-Dalmanutha.

NOTES

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS ACCOUNT

The key position of this account in the argumentation of Matthew is worthy of notice. Although his introductory geographical notes are less precise than Mark's, anyone familiar with Mark's Gospel could know that the incidents recorded in this section took place on the Decapolis side of the Galilean Lake. (Cf. Mt. 15:29 with Mk. 7:31) But even without this valuable piece of information offered his readers, had Matthew really intended to describe nothing more than a series of miracles worked for a strictly Jewish group, he could have shown more caution against misunderstanding. Instead, he drops clues that help the reader to decide that the Messiah is ministering to a mixed Jewish-Gentile group:

1. The response of the multitudes to Jesus' miracles now differs from that recorded when Jesus fed the five thousand. The latter, a predominantly (if not entirely) Jewish group, immediately express a Jewish reaction by identifying Jesus as "the Prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn. 6:14). Contrarily, the present crowd express their marvel at Jesus' miracles by "glorifying the God of Israel," a fact that suggests the predominantly Gentile character of this group. (See on 15:31.)
2. The "baskets" are different. For the five thousand, they were food baskets considered typical of the Jews, because they carried kosher food when on journeys through Gentile country (*kôfinoi*;

Arndt-Gingrich, 448). For the four thousand, however, they were big wicker baskets, or hampers (*spuridas*; see *ISBE*, 413; however see on 15:37.) This distinction is maintained even in Jesus' rehearsal of the two miracles. (Mt. 16:9f; Mk. 8:18f) Were the latter baskets typical of Gentiles merely because they were not specifically typically of Jews?

3. Jesus' handling of the situation is relaxed and natural, without the tensions and pressure noticed during the feeding of the five thousand Galileans. (See Jesus' Problem and Plan, 14:13.) Unless some radical transformation has taken place in those politically volatile Galileans, there is no adequate explanation for Jesus' unforced decision to feed these people now gathered, unless it be that He is dealing with completely different people. In fact, He is probably standing in Decapolis, surrounded by a crowd well-mixed with a heavy pagan constituency, among whom He can freely move without involuntarily inciting Zealots to riot against Rome.
4. Whereas we are unable to identify Magadan-Dalmanutha with certainty, to which Jesus sailed after the miraculous multiplication of food for the four thousand, this would have been less a problem for the original readers who could easily deduce where Jesus would have been, and conclude that He had been among the half-heathen population of the Decapolis.
5. It is also a temptation to follow Edersheim's suggestion (*Life*, I, 684; II, 65) that notes Jesus two prayers for the loaves and the fish (Mk. 8:6f) on this occasion, but only for the bread at the feeding of the five thousand because it was the main article of food, a typically Jewish distinction. Nevertheless, while solidly based on John's wording (see Jn. 6:11), the Synoptic evidence is not so clearly unequivocal, since they indicate that Jesus had both bread and fish in His hands when He blessed them. (Cfr. Mt. 14:19 and par.) Even so, why did Jesus pray once for each item now?

Admittedly no single factor mentioned above, taken alone, is convincing, but seen in combination with the others, might be understood as leading to the conviction that Matthew is describing a series of miracles done by the Messiah for people less than 100% Hebrew.

Now, if Jesus is pictured here as ministering to a mixed Jewish-Gentile group, where JEW AND GENTILE SIT DOWN TOGETHER TO EAT A COMMON MEAL IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE MESSIAH AND PROVIDED BY HIM, then Matthew's purpose for recording this incident

in precisely this chapter becomes acid-clear. In effect, he teaches that standard Jewish ceremonial separatism is finished as a useful concept. Purity, which had been fundamental motivation for national separation and personal holiness, is now decided by quite different criteria such as human need, the condition of men's hearts, and their relative distance from God. Israel, says Matthew, transgressed God's commandment to keep human rules and so was liable for all the impurities that came out of Israel's heart (15:1-20). Genuine faith in Israel's Messiah can be found even among Canaanites (15:21-28), and, finally, Gentiles can sit down with Israel to feast on the Messiah's bounty even in this world (15:29-39). What a challenge to a lot of Jewish theology this chapter must have been! Although Matthew has written pro-Gentile statements before (see on 12:21), this enacted lesson must have struck home to Hebrews hearts with sledge-hammer force, especially as this event stands out in startling contrast to standard Jewish apocalyptic views of what the Messianic banquet should be.

Even if that half-heathenish population could hardly have perceived it, Matthew's attentive reader must certainly feel that when this Son of David goes beyond the geographical and spiritual borders of Israel and becomes a blessing to all nations—after all, to the Jews, ANY move beyond Israel practically opens things up to just everyone!—He is moving toward the fulfillment of God's intention that His Christ reach out to all nations, making it possible that in Abraham's true Son all the families of the earth be blessed. (Cf. Mt. 1:1; Gen. 12:3; 22:17f; Gal. 3:16)

A. SITUATION: JOURNEY THROUGH DECAPOLIS
FROM PHOENICIA TO GALILEE
(Mt. 15:29; Mk. 7:31)

15:29 **And Jesus departed thence**, i.e. from the district of Tyre, passing north through Sidon by a circuitous route which took the group east over the Lebanon mountains, across the Beqa'a Valley (= Leontes River), then south through the region of the Decapolis in the tetrarchy of Philip. He would thus approach the Sea of Galilee on its east side. (Mk. 7:31) He deliberately followed this round-about route in order to skirt Galilee and avoid inevitable clashes there, deliberately lengthening this trip as much as possible to gain maximum opportunity to be with His men before the final skirmishes that would

precede the crisis in Jerusalem. He came **nigh unto the Sea of Galilee**: how *nigh* is not told, because this may be only a relative geographical notice, not intending to affirm that He was even then seated on a hill overlooking the lake. At the conclusion of the feeding of the four thousand, true, He embarked to sail for Magadan-Dalmanutha, but this need not be conclusive in determining how far from the lake and how far into the Decapolis region Jesus was during the intervening period before sailing. **And he went up into the mountain, and sat there.** Which *mountain* (*tò òros*) is not identifiable, because the area east of the Sea of Galilee, and standing out in contrast with it, is marked by heights rising to 1000-2000 feet. (Cf. Golan Heights)

The Decapolis area is essentially pagan country, consisting of ten free Greek cities within the territory of ancient Israel, mostly located east of the Jordan Valley. (See note on 4:25 and map, Vol. I, p. 181.) Why, then, should Jesus be so ready to help people among that not strictly Hebrew population, especially after His rigid stance on helping Gentiles in Phoenicia? Two factors help solve this puzzle:

1. Because this mixed Jewish-Gentile population dwelt in at least a nominally Israelite territory, there would be less confusion about the primary goal of His mission.
2. Having clarified once for all His truly Jewish Messiahship and mission, the Lord now generously illustrates its intended ramifications by blessing both Jews and Gentiles together. Because of the mixed character of the Decapolis population, Jesus can easily carry out the Syrophenician woman's principle without compromise, even if on the drastically limited scale we see here. He can "let the children first be fed," while "the puppies under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Although the commentators are undoubtedly correct in imagining this period as one of great training and strengthening for the Twelve, yet Matthew and Mark relate nothing of their lessons, pausing only to tell, in this terse, summary fashion, about His ministry among the bi-racial dwellers of the Decapolis.

NOTE: It just may be that these non-Jewish or mixed racial situations furnished opportunity for precisely those lessons that the congenitally biased Apostles needed in order to appreciate even distantly a Kingdom of God in which Jews and Gentiles alike could receive one another for Christ's sake. To put it another way, our Gospel writers, rather than omit any mention of

the training of the Twelve during this long journey abroad, may be actually intending to communicate the content of the lessons learned, using the recorded events as illustrations. That is, was the Lord slowly but deliberately exposing His narrow-minded Jewish followers to the reality of human need beyond the borders of Israel? If it seems that the texts of the events that transpired abroad hardly justify such an emphasis, let it be remembered how gently the Lord would have to move to remove long-standing, deep-rooted prejudices against any consideration of Gentiles as possible candidates for the Kingdom.

While there were many pagans who dwelt in the independent Greek cities of the Decapolis, it should not be thought that there were no Jews at all. Nevertheless, even these Hebrews, whose daily business brought them into constant contact with their pagan neighbors, probably tended to be far less rigid than their more fervent Galilean compatriots, who in turn were despised by their Judean coreligionists as ignorant and unworthy representatives of purer Judaism.

In fact, the importance of the events in this section is best seen by the way it contrasts with the unbelief and rejection that Jesus had experienced among the Jews of Galilee and the religious bigots from Jerusalem. Morgan (*Matthew*, 202) comments graphically:

All the difficulties were in Jerusalem among those men who were always washing their hands! Christ has no difficulty with the man who is polluted with sin, when that man signs his soul to Him in faith. But He has a good deal of difficulty with the traditional ritualist. It is the man who comes with the great burden, who in faith commits his need to the King, that feels all the virtue of His healing pass into his life. There is no difficulty with these people when they believe.

Although Jesus had been rejected in the Decapolis area earlier (see notes on 8:28, 34), yet in mercy He forgives and forgets their past ingratitude and welcomes their change of heart, however late it comes.

B. MANY MIRACLES OF HEALING (Mt. 15:30f; Mk. 7:32-37)

15:30 **And there came unto him great multitudes.** Where did all these people come from?

1. Was it the news of Jesus presence heralded by those who knew of

- the Syrophenician woman's daughter's deliverance? The distance is great enough to render this possibility less likely. Also, her understanding of His Jewish mission and the exceptional nature of His blessing this one Gentile would probably have counselled her silence, even if He had never so requested.
2. Is the deaf stammerer (Mk. 7:32-37), because of his disobedience to Jesus' injunction to silence, not merely one example of the great number healed, but also one of the sparks that ignited the excitement that swelled the crowd? If so, it is not all his fault, since, to be healed, he was taken aside from the multitude already present. (Mk. 7:33)
 3. Hardly a year before, Jesus sent one of the former demoniacs at Gergesa (Gadara, Gerasa, see Mt. 8:28; Mk. 5:1) throughout this district, telling what great things God had done for him. But the ex-demoniac, whose very life was a living monument to Christ's compassion and power, had proclaimed not only in his home city, but throughout the Decapolis, how much JESUS had done for him. It may be that many of those people he influenced, upon hearing about the personal arrival in the Decapolis of a Person so wonderful as that described by the former demoniac, immediately flocked to Him. In this case, the Lord is merely taking advantage of the excellent advance publicity provided by His humble servant.
 4. The very Gerasenes (or Gadarenes), also inhabitants of the Decapolis, are perhaps just as glad to see Jesus back as they had been for Him to leave earlier. (See notes on 8:34.)
 5. The subjective reason for their coming was their faith in Jesus:
 - a. Not a theoretical conviction crushed by traditionalism and ritual;
 - b. Nor a creed to be received, recited and promptly forgotten;
 - c. But trust in a Person whose ability was unlimited. Their act of bringing their sick folk to the Lord was a venture of faith.

Having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others. (Cf. notes on 11:4; 4:23f; 8:16) **And they cast them down at his feet:** this surprising verb "cast them down" (*rhipto*) may also be used with no connotation of violence in the sense of "to put or lay down" (Arndt-Gingrich, 744), which is probably the nuance intended here. (Cf. its synonym *ballo* in Mt. 9:2; 8:6, 14; cf. LXX: Gen. 21:15) This, because of the very slight probability that the sick accepted their being tossed around without complaint, and because the tender concern of their kinfolk already manifest in bringing them

to Jesus probably would not permit them to treat them in a manner incongruous with that concern. **And he healed them.** Jesus generously responded to their enthusiasm and concern to bring their sick to Him: whoever they were—Jew or Gentile, **He healed them.** What glorious completeness: everyone laid at Jesus' feet felt the power of His own healing energy surge through their body, making them well again! How Jesus' time would have been occupied in these three days, otherwise in healing sick folk, neither Evangelist tells us. Is it possible that the Savior could stay three days with people and NOT teach them? This would be determined in each case not only by the urgent needs of the people, but more especially, as here, by the schedule and planning of Jesus. If He saw that popular preaching to that group could cause no serious interruption of His timing, there is no compelling motive to prohibit Him from so doing. Foster (*Middle Period*, 203ff) imaginatively suggests that Jesus led a three-day summer camp meeting with typically Jewish crowd participation. However, if we have correctly guessed the large pagan character of this group, then total group participation in Jewish Psalms and other expressions of popular worship would necessarily be limited.

15:31 The results of Jesus work: **the multitude wondered**, and well they should, **when they saw the dumb speaking.** Whereas Matthew passed over the healing of the deaf stammerer (Mk. 7:32-37), he evidently knew about it, even mentioning such cases first in his summary. **They saw . . . the maimed whole:** deformed cripples now enjoyed the normal use of their limbs. Two excellent results occurred when Jesus worked:

1. Astonished crowds: "He has done all things well!" (Mk. 7:37) Contrast the commonplaceness with which Jesus' miracles would be seen over in Galilee around Capernaum. The extraordinary nature of Jesus' wonders is still fresh, still news here in the Decapolis. Contrast this reaction with that of roughly the same populace after the liberation of the Gadarene demoniacs. (Mt. 8:34 and par.) Their reaction seems almost self-accusatory: "Look what we've been missing all this time!" Every human weakness to which He turned His attention became strength. Not only did He succeed in curing brilliantly every case brought to Him, but the humble, generous, personally tender way He went about it set Him worlds apart from all others.
2. God was glorified: **They glorified the God of Israel.** Contrast the repeatedly fruitless prayers of many of these benighted Gentiles

offered to Greek or Syrian deities. Here, without fanfare or blustering argumentation, Jesus sounds the defeat of idolatry on a practical level that anyone can verify, and He causes men to rejoice in the undoubted victory of Jehovah! These humble people discern the evidential value of Jesus' miracles combined with His forgiving, generous love, and conclude that such rich gifts can come only from *the God of Israel*. What a contrast to those venomous critics who could see no more than Satan's power behind all that He did!

Is McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 404) right to believe that "the people whom Jesus healed were Jews, but daily intercourse with the heathen of Decapolis had tended to cool their religious ardor. The works of Jesus revived this ardor and caused them to praise the God whose prophet they esteemed Jesus to be"? Regarding the probability that Jesus stirred the ancient fervor of the Jews themselves, yes, however, it may be too much to believe that He healed ONLY Jews. In fact, although *the God of Israel* be a common title for *Jawéh* (Lk. 1:68; Ac. 13:17), it instantly distinguishes Him from the gods of the gentiles. (Cf. Ex. 5:1; 1 Kg. 11:9 et al.)

This implied contrast is not without profound theological implications, when perined in this context by a Matthew. Whereas an orthodox reader might tend to be scandalized by the undifferentiated banqueting together by Gentiles and Jews, Matthew shouts that the evident psychological result of Jesus' miracles was definitely not undifferentiated, but gloriously specific and theologically correct: *men glorified the GOD OF ISRAEL!* "Salvation is of the JEWS!" (Jn. 4:22) But even so, Matthew's emphasis is not triumphalistic nor boastful of his nation's glories. Rather, he draws the readers' mind to his nation's God who is busy lowering segregation barriers without compromising His own high holiness, since it was *the God of Israel* who was at work in Jesus of Nazareth.

C. JESUS FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND

(Mt. 15:32-39; Mk. 8:1-10)

The similarities between this miraculous multiplication of food and that of the feeding of the five thousand are so many that it is not necessary to repeat what has been written about the essential features. Comments on analogous features are limited to a reference

to the earlier notes. Differences in details become important as we respond to cynical students who believe both Evangelists to have fallen prey to two confused accounts of but one incident garbled in oral transmission. Beyond the formal differences involved in the numbers (i.e. 5000 versus 4000 men; 5 loaves as against 7 loaves; 12 baskets in contrast to 7 baskets), there are other evidences that this is not the same event as the former miracle:

1. Matthew (16:9) and Mark (8:19f) both affirm indirectly the differentiation of the two events by quoting Jesus' use of the two separate miracles as the basis for His argument. If there were but one event, not only would Jesus Himself be pictured as confused, but both Evangelists could be reprimanded for gross oversight, since they both cite His words.
2. While the geographic location is somewhat the same, the circumstances that convoke the multitudes are quite dissimilar. The five thousand came over from Galilee to the eastern side of the Lake of Tiberias, and returned there after the miracle. (Cf. Notes on 14:13, 14; and Jn. 6:1-5, 22-25) The four thousand, on the other hand, are residents of the Decapolis region.
3. Whereas the five thousand sat upon the grass around Passover time (Jn. 6:4, 10; Mk. 6:39), the four thousand sit "on the ground," a fact possibly indicative of a later period when the grass would have been dried up in the summer heat.
4. Consider also the differences mentioned earlier under "The Critical Importance of this Account," where clues to the mixed half-Jewish, half-pagan character of this episode are noticed.

Objectors may ask why Jesus should repeat a multiple miraculous feeding, since, after all, had He not already demonstrated once and for all His power to do this? Would not a repetition tend to cast doubt on, rather than confirm, His mastery? No, Jesus chose to repeat this miracle for several reasons:

1. Because of His own compassion for the human weakness of these people. (15:32)
2. Because it could serve as a test of His disciples' learning by probing their memory and comprehension. This repeated miracle and the lessons it carried with it would serve to drive the disciples to an unshakeable conviction of Jesus' power. (But see 16:4ff.) As they reflected on it later, it became the second solid hammer-blow that drove home the nail of conviction.

3. Because, if there were many Gentiles present, perhaps even more than Jews, He could unobtrusively give them a liberal demonstration of the power and tender consideration of the God of Israel.
4. Because the repetition of a miracle just does not weaken the force of its first manifestation, any more than the raising of Lazarus should somehow be thought to adumbrate or undermine the raising of Jairus' daughter.

15:32 Cf. notes on 14:14. Again Jesus initiates the move to solve the crowd's food needs, but this time, rather than put pressure on the Twelve to solve the problem, His decision grows out of His own feeling for them: **I have compassion on the multitude.** When people hurt or have needs, the Lord responds with the strength, the kindness and the thoughtfulness of a gentleman. These people He helps are not Christians, as we would esteem them, but just frail human beings many of whom are outside the limits of revealed religion. Nevertheless, He shared with them His bounty, not stopping to check their synagogue attendance record or ask to see their baptismal certificate before providing them a crust of bread and some fish tidbits. They had not even asked for food, just help and healing; He lovingly gave them more than they imagined He had!

Because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat: and I would not send them away fasting, lest haply they faint on the way. With me now three days, by the usual Jewish reckoning, means "since the day before yesterday." Since He does not affirm that they had fasted three days, it appears that the people had dined on the first day, picknicked on the second, but now find themselves without provisions. Their continuance with Jesus is explicable on the basis of the many miracles He worked on their behalf, even if the entire time had not been consumed in healings.

The unusual Greek nominative *hemérai treîs* ("three days"), which is not the grammatical subject of *prosménousîn moi* ("they have been with me"), is not unknown in Biblical literature. (Cf. LXX: Josh. 1:11; Jonah 3:4)

15:33 **And the disciples say unto him, whence should we have so many loaves in a desert place as to fill so great a multitude?** (Cf. notes on 14:16) The repetition of the disciples' lack of believing certainty in so analógous a circumstance and consequent to such a grand miracle as the feeding of the five thousand such a relatively short time before, is not so shocking as it would appear on the surface.

Rather, it is but evidence of the authenticity of the narrative, in that it is so psychologically true to life in the straightforward manner it depicts their hesitation. How frequently is a crisis met with forgetfulness of past blessings which should have taught men to know God and never falter or hesitate where He is in charge? (Cf. Moses' reaction, Nu. 11:21-23; Israel's, Psa. 78:19f, 32) Why did not the Twelve expect Jesus to supply food miraculously as before?

1. They may have considered Jesus' prudent limitation of His supernatural power, because He had not supplied miraculous bread for their travels either before or after the feeding of the five thousand. Farrar (*Life*, 362) reasons thus:

But surely here there is a touch of delicacy and truth. They knew that there was in Him no prodigality of the supernatural, no lavish and needless exercise of miraculous power. Many and many a time had they been with multitudes before, and yet on one occasion only had He fed them; and moreover, after He had done so, He had most sternly rebuked those who came to Him in expectation of a repeated offer of such gifts, and had uttered a discourse so searching and strange that it alienated from Him many even of His friends. For them to suggest to Him a repetition of the feeding of the five thousand would be a presumption which their ever-deepening reverence forbade. . . . But no sooner had He given them the signal of His intention, than with perfect faith they become His ready ministers.

2. Further, having noticed the Gentile character of a significant portion of the crowd, especially after spending the better part of three days with these people, the Apostles may have wondered whether He would provide miraculous bread to be eaten together by Jew and Gentile at the same table.
3. But even their own question does not necessarily express doubt about Jesus' power, rather, merely about their own incapacity to supply food themselves. Note their emphasis: **Where are WE to get bread?** (*Pòthen hemîn en eremìa ârtoi tosoûtoi* k.t.l.) They may well have remembered their past failure, so phrased this question so as to leave Jesus entirely free to choose His course of action.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 604) justly warns: "To say that the reply of the disciples gives no evidence of the knowledge of a previous miraculous

feeding and betrays nothing but complete perplexity, is to misread not only this reply but also all that precedes this reply." In fact, Jesus is not recorded as having scolded them for lack of faith or foresight. Although Scripture's silence can never offer positive testimony, yet in the absence of a firm word to the contrary, we may assume that the Evangelists intend to convey the impression that He did not reproach them for failure to trust His power.

15:34 **And Jesus said unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven and a few small fishes.** (Cf. Mk. 6:38 and notes on Mt. 14:16) This time, rather than appeal to others, they apparently check their own food stock left from their provisions for the journey just completed outside Palestine.

15:35-37 Cf. Notes on 14:17-20. **Seven baskets full:** Much ado is made over the size and significance of the baskets used to collect the left-overs, without asking the insoluble, but vital, question: to whom did the baskets belong? If these hamper baskets (*spūridas*) belong to the people in the crowd, they may indicate the non-Jewish character of the people who ate. On the other hand, if these baskets were specially acquired by the Twelve for their long journey into Gentile territory, then the baskets themselves tell nothing about the multitude. Or would the Twelve have only carried kosher food wallets (*kōfinoi*)? If so, then these baskets (*spūridas*) may belong to the multitude.

Whereas there is a fine discrimination in words at 16:9f (= Mk. 8:19f) that carefully retains the distinctions in *baskets* for the five thousand and the four thousand respectively, this distinction should not be pushed too far, because Rocci, (1696) cites illustrations of "basket dinners" in connection with *spūris*: e.g. *spūrisi deipnizein*, "dine" . . ., Arriano Epictetus 4, 10, 21; *apō spūridos deīpna*: "dinners from the basket." Ateneo, 365.

15:38 Cf. notes on 14:21. **Four thousand:** Is the argument airtight to say that, had this incident been born out of mythical and unhistorical traditions, the miraculous details of this second miraculous feeding of the multitudes would certainly have surpassed those of the first? In fact, would not a clever forger foresee this argument and deliberately reduce the second myth to more believable proportions to promote an intentional fraud? Granted, the psychological impact of a second, somehow less spectacular miracle is to us anticlimactic. It is not, however, more or less believable because of that fact. Rather, for Matthew and his Hebrew readers, this miracle

may have been ANYTHING BUT ANTI-CLIMACTIC! In fact, if Jesus fed Jews and Gentiles that day at the same banquet in the desert, this is an exciting climax, even more glorious than the feeding of the five thousand that ended in the Capernaum synagogue debacle. (Jn. 6)

15:39 See notes on 14:22. **And he sent away the multitudes**, because it is not Jesus' purpose now to begin a wide-ranging, popular public ministry in the Decapolis, and because of the live possibility that His own popularity should become the involuntary means of its untimely realization. **He entered into the boat** (*enébe eis tō plofon*): whose boat? Did they watch for Zebedee's fishing group to cross to the east side in order to seek passage across the Galilean Lake? (Cf. Mk. 1:20) Might *the boat*, so definitely indicated by the article, have been Peter's, having been sent for earlier? He **came into the borders of Magadan**, a locality that must be sought on the west side of the lake, because they embark on the Decapolis, or eastern, shore. After the later encounter with the Pharisees (16:1-4), they sail for "the other side" arriving at Bethsaida (Julias? Mk. 8:13, 22), when they travel to Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16:13). When Mark (8:10) says "Dalmanutha" in place of "Magadan," we may assume that these different names are but two ways of referring to the same locality, or perhaps two nearby towns in the same district, or one a place name and the other a descriptive as yet undeciphered.

SIMILARITIES TO THE FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND:

1. This text shows the holy consistency of Jesus as Savior. *PHC* (Vol. XXII, 389) comments:

Wherever He is (so this repetition shows us) there is the same depth and spontaneity of compassion; the same discrimination and considerateness of affection; the same recollection as well of the temporal as of the spiritual needs of His hearers; the same marked disapprobation also (with all His fulness) of waste; and the same resolute avoidance, also, when the multitudes have been fully met, of idle wonder and fame."

2. Foster (*Middle Period*, 206) argues brilliantly that Jesus' objective for this repeated miracle was two-fold, i.e. not merely to minister to the body by restoring health and strength, but also to meet the spirit's needs by producing faith:

Is faith demanded before miracles, but not afterward? Is lack of faith in the hearts of men not a "human need" to which miracles may minister? The repetition of miracles to bring faith to the hearts of men is as logical as repetition of teaching to bring understanding.

LESSONS

- a. Jesus challenges those who are content with doing nothing merely because they have little with which to work. "How many loaves do you HAVE?"
- b. Jesus would not do all this work Himself, nor would He summon even one of the angels in heaven to do what His human helpers could.
- c. Jesus did not use heavenly means to provide the need until the full extent of earthly provision could be ascertained and provided.
- d. Jesus taught by practical demonstration that Jews and Gentiles can sit down in peace to eat bread together in His Kingdom, their only points of common interest being their own deep need and His invitation and provision.
- e. If we see the Gospels as living lessons on "What It Means to Be the Body of Jesus Christ on Earth Today," the Church, then, must express the compassion of the Lord for people, not by sentimentalities more or less hypocritical, but by swift action to correct the needs of people in each situation faced. Jesus always left men with strength for the way: does the Church do as well?
- f. *PHC* (Vol. XXII, 390):

We must not tempt men to adopt religion by bribery; we should thus encourage hypocrisy, promote indolence, give a premium to iniquity. But as Christians we should relieve temporal want, and with due caution and discretion use this as a means of imparting spiritual good. Our Lord fed the multitude on this occasion though He well knew that their motives in following Him were far from being pure. We should distinguish between vulgar bribery and Christian benevolence. In any case it were better to do good to men's bodies than do no good at all.

- g. Even as those who had earlier rejected Jesus' help and hurried Him away now gladly receive His help, we may learn that there is

mercy with the Lord, even though we ignorantly and temporarily send Him away. Let us thank Him for the privilege of repentance, because He longs to return to us with an abundance of rich gifts.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DEITY WE SEE IN JESUS IN MATTHEW 15

1. Law-Giver and Judge: "Ye hypocrites!" The Law-Giver can set aside Moses' Law. (15:1-20; Mk. 7:19)
2. Conqueror of Evil: He cast out a demon without even a verbal order! (15:21-28)
3. Creator: Healer of His maimed creation. (15:29-31)
4. Sustainer: fed 4000 on practically nothing (15:32-38)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the vital need for this trip that Jesus takes with the Twelve. Refer to any facts of significance drawn from earlier periods that give clues.
2. Show on a map, or indicate the travel plan that Matthew and Mark describe. Into the area of what two famous cities did Jesus lead His men? According to Mark, through which one of the two did they travel?
3. Is there any record of Jesus ever making another trip out into Gentile territory? When? Under what circumstances?
4. Name the major area where the events of this section occurred. On what other occasion(s) had Jesus been in this area? What had He done there previously? What had been the reaction of the populace to His earlier ministry there?
5. What changes are obvious in the response of the people of this area to the ministry described in this section?
6. Matthew describes this ministry in general terms, while Mark gives a specific incident. Describe this incident, explaining any problems arising in connection with Jesus' method.
7. What psychological preparation had been made for Jesus' service in this area, between His first visit here and the ministry recorded in this text?
8. Describe the religio-political makeup of this crowd now gathered around Jesus. List the reasons you conclude that the group was

- of this nature.
9. List any significant differences between the two miraculous multiplications of food to feed large multitudes. Some unbelieving theologians feel that the Gospel writers confused two separate legends that centered around one fundamental incident. Give, therefore, the evidence that proves the Gospel writers saw a clear distinction between the two miracles.
 10. List the facts or statements within this section that lend insight into the personal character or supernatural identity of Jesus.
 11. Quote the two separate statements that describe the crowds' reaction to Jesus' ministry in this section.

THE SECTS OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES CONTRASTED

by Lynn Gardner

A political or religious movement in time usually results in two groups, a liberal and a conservative party. Judaism followed this pattern as a study of Jewish sects and denominations reveals. The Pharisees formed the right wing and the Sadducees the left wing of Judaism. We can see the contrast in these terms: the Pharisees were separatists and the Sadducees were collaborators; one nationalistic, the other internationalistic; one orthodox and fundamental, the other modernist and liberal; one supernaturalistic and the other humanistic. Neither party was free from error, as both, at times, felt the censure of Jesus.

Origin and Early History

The Babylonian captivity taught the Jews to be monotheistic [i.e. true to their God-given ideals to which they had been unfaithful before the captivity and brought on this punishment. HEF], gave them the synagogue and increased interest in the Scripture and the religious practice enjoined therein. The reformers, Ezra and Nehemiah, possibly were forerunners of the Pharisees. It is also possible that the priestly court party under Zerubbabel foreshadowed the Sadducees. When Jerusalem came under the power of Alexander

the Great, the pressure toward Hellenization became strong. After Alexander's death his kingdom was divided into four segments, Palestine was a political football, first ruled by the Ptolemies of Egypt, then the Syrian rulers of Antioch, "The rise of a Hellenistic party among the Jewish priestly aristocrats threatened the utter destruction of the Old Testament religion. Hellenistic culture, customs, and idolatry along with the use of the Greek language threatened to inundate the nation. Countering this infidel and pagan movement among the priesthood, there arose a group of pious Jews full of devotion to the law, and fierce in their opposition to the corrupting Greek influences."¹ When the Syrians were attempting to force the Jews to accept Hellenization, in 167 B.C., Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, headed a rebellion. The Pharisees supported the Maccabeans in their campaigns, but John Hyrcanus, when in power, formed an alliance with the Sadducees, who remained the party supporting the government so long as the Maccabeans were in power. In 37 B.C. when Herod began to reign, he promptly executed forty-five of the most powerful Sadducees, thus bringing the Pharisees back into power. In the days of Christ the Pharisees had more religious influence and the Sadducees had more political power, as we shall see.

Significance of Their Names

The term "Pharisees" means "the separated ones." It is not known whether this title was self-assumed or was given them by enemies. Earlier they had been called the Hasidim, then came to be called Pharisees because of their separatism. They were an exclusive group, while the Sadducees were inclusive in their fellowship. They even separated from those of their own race who did not accept or follow their interpretations of the law. We can see the intense prejudice against "publicans and sinners" in Luke 15:1, 2; 18:9-13.²

The Sadducees either derived their name from Zadok, who was high priest in the days of David and Solomon and whose sons were

¹ R. C. Foster, *An Introduction to the Life of Christ*, p. 62.

² Edersheim believes that the name Pharisees was given to them by their opponents. He states that they called themselves Chasidim, or "the pious." *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 323.

the priestly hierarchy in the time of the captivity,³ or from the word meaning "righteous." Edersheim asks, "Is it likely that a party would have gone back so many centuries for a name, which had no connection with their distinctive principles?" He further argues that the name is a derivation from the word for righteous:

While the Pharisees would arrogate to themselves the Scriptural name of *Chasidim*, or "the pious," their opponents would retort that they were satisfied to be *Tsaddiqim*, or "righteous." Thus the name of *Tsaddiqim* would become that of the party opposing the Pharisees, that is, of the *Sadducees*. There is, indeed, an admitted linguistic difficulty in the change of the sound *i* into *u* (*Tsaddiqim* into *Tsadduqim*), but may it not have been that this was accomplished, not grammatically, but by popular witticism? Such mode of giving a "by-name" to a party or government is, at least, not irrational, nor is it uncommon. Some wit might have suggested: Read not *Tsaddiqim*, the "righteous," but *Tsadduqim* (from *Tsadu*) "desolation, destruction." Whether or not this suggestion approve itself to critics, the derivation of Sadducees from *Tsaddiqim* is certainly that which offers most probability.⁴

Their Power and Influence

In the New Testament the Pharisees are the most prominent, as they were in the entire first century. They were the unrivaled teachers of the people because the common people recognized the Pharisees as the true and loyal standardbearers of traditional Israel. Josephus said of the Sadducees, "They only gain the well-to-do; they have not the people on their side."⁵ "This doctrine has reached few individuals,

³ These scriptures give historical Biblical background for Zadok and his sons: II Chron. 31:10; Ezek. 40:46; 44:15; 48:11. This hypothesis for the origin of the name is a Jewish legend of about the seventh century A.D. It receives no support from Josephus or early Jewish writings. [Other rabbinic works, however, identify the Sadducees' forefather as Zadok, disciple of Antigonus of Socho (*Aboth de Rab. Nathan*, cap. 5; cf. Bowker, 162; 6:1, 2) who was himself a disciple of Simeon the Just, "one of the remnants of the Great Synagogue." (Mishnah: *Aboth*, i, 1-4; cf. Bowker, 109; 2:26) This Antigonus lived about 250 B.C. (*ISBE*, 2659), which would date the above-named Zadok after that date. HEF]

⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, 323, 324.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII, 10, 6.

but these are of the first consideration."⁶ Levison says concerning the Sadducees:

That they did not find followers among the working classes is not to be wondered at. The Pharisees had politically a Utopia to promise. The Messiah was their offer to the people. And if not the Messiah, a resurrection after death which would bring with it material bliss. In these matters the Sadducees' platform was poor; all they could afford was a satisfaction that comes from a consciousness of having done one's duty, and the rest must be left to God.⁷

Josephus says of the Pharisees: "Whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers and sacrifice, they (the people) perform them according to their direction."^{7a}

The Sadducees did not make the strict profession of religion current among the Pharisees unless they found it profitable in securing and retaining a place of power among the people. They were moved by policy continually, and usually adopted the principles of the Pharisees when they secured an official position.⁸ This could be illustrated by this story: according to the teaching of the Sadducees the incense was to be lighted outside the Holy Place and carried burning within; according to the Pharisees, on the contrary, it must be lighted inside. Once a young priest—a Sadducee—performed this function in the manner approved by the Sadducees. Later his father admonished him, "Though we are Sadducees, we must do as the Pharisees teach, for they have the people behind them."⁹

In the days of Jesus and during the rise of the church they [the Pharisees] constituted the backbone of Judaism. Firmly entrenched in their religious leadership, revered by the masses, with synagogues virtually in their control, they alone of the groups known to us survived the dreadful years of revolt against Rome.¹⁰

The Pharisees excelled in popularity with the people and religious

⁶ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 1, 4.

⁷ Levison, *Jewish Background of Christianity*, p. 162.

^{7a} Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 1.3, 4.

⁸ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁹ Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, p. 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

influence in general. But in the area of political power and influence the Sadducees are in the forefront. Foster shows this distinction:

They (the Pharisees) believed in a "theocratic democracy"; God was their sole king. But they bowed to the Roman rule as a punishment for the sins of the nation. They were a religious rather than a political party. Nevertheless, they looked for a Messiah to lead against Rome, and when they thought the proper time had come, they revolted with the rest. Josephus says there were more than six thousand Pharisees, but not all the Pharisees were scribes, and had supplanted the priests as instructors of the people when the Pharisees gradually won the favor of the masses. The scribes rule in the synagogue, as the Sadducees in the temple.¹¹

Actually the Pharisees took little interest in politics as long as the government did not interfere with their religious pursuits. But the Sadducees were more concerned with political affairs than with religious.

Since Jerusalem functioned as the political capital of Judaism, and the Temple the headquarters of Jewish government, the interests there became dominantly political. These worldly and political interests controlled the Sadducees.¹²

They possessed the political power and were the governing group in the civil life of Judaism during the days of Christ. The New Testament (Acts 5:17) and Josephus (*Ant.* xx, 9, 1) testify that the high-priestly families belonged to the Sadducean party. The Sadducees were the dominant group in the Sanhedrin, which was the "supreme court" of Judaism.

Doctrines

There was disagreement concerning the law and traditions. Josephus says, "The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses." Their theory of tradition was that these additions to the written law and interpretations of it had been given by Moses

¹¹ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 75f.

¹² H. E. Dana, *New Testament Times*, p. 57.

THE SECTS OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES CONTRASTED

to the elders and by them transmitted orally down through the years. They taught these traditions as binding upon Jews and having equal and sometimes greater authority than the law. It must be recognized that the Sadducees were not opposed to traditions as such but they were opposed to the principle and practice of traditionalism of the Pharisees.

And that there was sufficient ground for Sadducean opposition to Pharisaic traditionalism, alike in principle and in practice, will appear from the following quotation, to which we add, by way of explanation, that the meaning of phylacteries was deemed by that party of Scriptural obligation, and that the phylactery for the head was to consist (according to tradition) of four compartments. "Against the words of the Scribes is more punishable than against the words of Scripture. He who says, No phylacteries, so as to transgress the words of Scripture, is not guilty (free); five compartments, to add to the words of the Scribes, he is guilty."¹³

The Sadducees recognized only the written law as binding and rejected the entire traditional interpretation by the Scribes. Josephus said, "The Sadducees say, 'Only what is written is to be esteemed as legal . . . what has come down from tradition of the fathers need not be observed.'"¹⁴ Scholars differ on whether they accepted all the Old Testament or only the Pentateuch. They were liberal in their attitude toward, and interpretation of, the law, but they were literal and conservative in its application.

Another doctrinal difference concerned the period "after death." "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." (Acts 23:8) The Pharisees believed that there was to be a final judgment with its consequent eternal rewards and punishments.

There was disagreement upon the doctrines of predestination and free will. Josephus called the Pharisean view "fatalism."

But, properly understood, the real difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees seems to have amounted to this: that the former accentuated God's preordination; the latter, man's free will; and that, while the Pharisees admitted only a partial influence of the human element on what happened, or the

¹³ Edersheim, *op. cit.*, I, 315.

¹⁴ Josephus, *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 6.

co-operation of the human with the Divine, the Sadducees denied all absolute preordination, and made man's choice of evil or good, with its consequent misery or happiness, to depend entirely on the exercise of free will and self-determination.¹⁵

Yet at times the Pharisees carried the idea of Providence to the verge of fatalism, as Edersheim admits. The absolute and unalterable predestination of every detail of every event is insisted upon. Some affirmed that every incident in the history of Israel was foreordained, and the actors in it—for good or for evil—were only instruments for carrying out the Divine Will. Yet their insistence upon man's freedom of choice and his personal responsibility and obligation modified their view of fate. Akiba stated it this way, "Everything is foreseen; free determination is accorded to man; and the world is judged in goodness."¹⁶

The Pharisees preached and looked for the Messiah, while the Sadducees did not. The Pharisees expected Him to be a political Messiah. (Cf. Lk. 17:20; 19:11; Jn. 12:32-34) They expected Him to glorify them and bring all nations to their point of view. The Sadducees were too well off and trusted themselves too much. They felt that the order of things which they had made was good enough for them and they neither wanted or needed a Messiah.

They also had some distinct differences concerning ceremonial and ritual and juridical questions.¹⁷

Characteristics

Because of their scrupulous obedience to the letter of the law the Pharisees became fussily self-righteous. Often in highest hypocrisy they considered themselves the only pious and righteous souls. Levison makes this comment concerning the self-righteousness of Sadducees.

They believed in themselves, and did not see the need for any change in the affairs of men. Their view of their own importance led them to take a very strong view of the freedom of the will;

¹⁵ Edersheim, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 316, 317.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 319.

¹⁷ Edersheim, I, pp. 319-322. [Cf. also Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, esp. pp. 53-76.]

they believed themselves to be capable of acting rightly without being helped or coerced by God into doing so. We usually think of the Pharisees as the self-righteous. Their self-righteousness was based upon the belief that they were doing the will of God; but the Sadducees were far more self-righteous, for they believed that they do and will rightly by personal effort. The Temple was not so much the dwelling-place of God as a place in which they allowed God a share with them in their special domain. As priests they saw to it that they shared with God in their sacrifices that were offered and in the glory of the offering.¹⁸

The Pharisees were over-zealous in legalism. They would restrict liberty for the sake of security and protection. This was called the "hedge about the law." The principle is the same which provides play pens for children and safety zones on city streets. They would build a fence about the Law to prevent one from transgression. Deut. 25:3 set the limit of punishment at forty lashes. The Pharisees reduced it to thirty-nine, lest it be accidentally exceeded. The elaborate fences about the commandments made the law a tedious and burdensome task. They seemed to think that the more difficult the commandments, the more merit they would receive for observing them.

Relationship of These Sects to Jesus

Attitude and Action of the Pharisees toward Jesus:

1. They disliked His claim to forgive sins and considered it blasphemy. Mt. 9:3f; Mk. 2:6f; Lk. 5:21
2. They objected to His social freedom with publicans and sinners. Mt. 9:11; Mk. 2:16; Lk. 5:30; 15:1
3. They complained that the disciples of Jesus did not observe stated fasts. Lk. 5:33
4. They accused Him of being in league with Satan. Mt. 9:34; 12:24ff; Mk. 3:22ff; Lk. 11:14ff.
5. They attacked Him for violating their rules of sabbath observance. Mt. 12:2, 10; Mk. 2:23f; 3:2; Lk. 6:2, 7; 13:14ff; Jn. 5:10, 18; 9:13ff.
6. They joined with the Herodians to kill Him. Mk. 3:6.

¹⁸ Levison, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

7. They joined with the Sadducees to test Him. Mt. 16:1; see Mt. 22.
8. To entrap Him Pharisees and Sadducees plotted His death. Mt. 27:62; Jn. 18:3.
9. They charged Him with planning the destruction of the Temple. Jn. 2:19; Mt. 26:59-61; 27:39, 40.
10. They accused Him of being a deceiver. Jn. 7:12; Mt. 27:62-64.
11. They ridiculed Him. Jn. 7:48.
12. They accused Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon. Jn. 7:20; 8:48; cf. 10:20.
13. They charged Jesus with treason against Caesar. Lk. 23:1f.
14. They mocked Christ on the cross. Mt. 27:41ff.
(There were some honest and [some relatively] friendly Pharisees. Lk. 7:36-50; 14:1ff; Jn. 3:1, 2; 7:50-52; 19:39.)

Jesus denounced the Pharisees as:

1. Hypocrites. Mt. 15:7; 23:13.
2. Offspring of vipers. Mt. 12:34; 23:33.
3. Inwardly wicked. Lk. 11:39-41.
4. Adulterous generation. Mt. 12:39; 16:4.
5. Blind guides. Mt. 15:14; 23:16, 19, 24, 26.
6. Whited sepulchres. Mt. 23:27.
7. More careless of the kingdom than publicans and harlots. Mt. 21:31f.
8. Unworthy of Moses' seat, which they held. Mt. 23:2ff.
9. Loving praise. Mt. 23:6ff.
10. Making proselytes worse than they were themselves. Mt. 23:15.
11. Unworthy of the kingdom which shall be taken away from them. Mt. 21:43ff.
12. Being tradition-bound. Mk. 7:3-13.
13. Self-righteous. Lk. 18:9.
14. Being prejudiced against Him. Jn. 5:39, 40.
15. Blasphemers. Mt. 12:22-32; Mk. 3:19b-30.
16. Rejecters of God. Lk. 7:29, 30; 10:16; Jn. 12:48-50.

Rejection of Christ by the Sadducees:

(They are mentioned by name only on three occasions in the Gospels, but they are referred to by the term "chief priests.")

THE SECTS OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES CONTRASTED

1. They tempted Jesus by demanding a sign from heaven. Mt. 16:1.
2. They tried to arrest Jesus at the feast of Tabernacles. Jn. 7:32, 45.
3. The raising of Lazarus angered them very much. Jn. 11:47.
4. Caiaphas (a Sadducee) called for the death of Jesus for a personal and political reason. Jn. 11:48-50.
5. They were enraged by the triumphal entry and entrance into the Temple itself. Mt. 21:15.
6. The cleansing of the Temple caused them to challenge the authority of Christ. Mt. 21:23; Mk. 11:27ff; Lk. 20:1ff.
7. They sought to entrap Jesus in a question about the resurrection. Mt. 22:23; Mk. 12:18; Lk. 20:27.
8. They took a leading part in the condemnation of Jesus.
Annas. Jn. 18:13, 19.
Caiaphas, chief persecutor. Mt. 26:57, 63, 65.
Brought charges before Pilate. Mt. 27:12; Mk. 15:3.
Stirred people to ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus. Mt. 27:20; Mk. 15:11.
9. They mocked Jesus on the cross. Mt. 27:41; Mk. 15:31; Lk. 23:35.

Jesus condemned the Sadducees:

1. He warned the kingdom of God would be taken away from them. Mt. 21:43ff.
2. He told them they were wrong about the resurrection and did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. Mt. 22:29.
3. He called them an evil and adulterous generation. Mt. 16:1-4.
4. Jesus warned the disciples to beware of their bad influence. Mt. 16:5-12.

Both conservatism and liberalism tend to pride and prejudice. One trusts himself concerning his interpretation of religion and the other trusts himself to determine his religion. The religious climate of Jesus' day is strangely familiar. Today we can see in religious thinking the same attitudes and tendencies only in different garb. We must not allow the Devil to push us off on the one side into exclusive sectarianism nor off the other side into inclusive latitudinarianism.

For Further Study

- Bowker, John. *Jesus and the Pharisees*. (Cambridge University Press) 1973. Bowker collects together in one volume translations of the relative literature and discusses the problems involved in identifying the Pharisees, the emergence and development of the Haskamic movement and its divisions, Jesus and the Pharisees, and their charges against Him.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Vol. I, pp. 308ff. See also his opening chapters VII and VIII in which he discusses the Jewish attitudes about separation from Gentiles, traditionalism: its origin, character and literature.

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

Give the context, problems, meaning and application of these phrases:

1. "Of a truth thou art the Son of God."
2. "It is not lawful for thee to have her."
3. "It is I; be not afraid."
4. "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore do these powers work in him."
5. "But in vain do they worship me, teaching *as their* doctrines the precepts of men."
6. ". . . and they glorified the God of Israel."
7. "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up."
8. "Whosoever shall say to his father or mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given *to God*; he shall not honor his father."
9. "Let them alone: they are blind guides."
10. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."
11. ". . . but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not the man."
12. "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? . . . Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition."
13. ". . . but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, this defileth the man."
14. "And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PREVIEWING IN OUTLINE FORM

- Section 39. Jesus refuses to give additional signs from heaven to religious leaders (15:39b—16:4)
- Section 40. Jesus warns disciples against the influence of popular leaders and parties (16:5-12)
- Section 41. Near Caesarea Philippi Jesus tests and teaches His disciples (16:13-28)

CONTENT OUTLINE

- I. RELIGIOUS LEADERS DEMAND ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION OF HIS AUTHORITY: JESUS REFUSES (15:39b—16:4; Mk. 8:10b-12)
- A. Situation: As if Jesus had given no previous supernatural credentials, the religious leaders demand them.
- B. Response: The critics are criticized.
1. "Although naturally capable of reading relatively dependable weather signs, you are morally unqualified to demand signs when these times are full of them, signs either unread or deliberately misunderstood!"
 2. Reminder of sign already given: "Jonah!"
- II. JESUS WARNS DISCIPLES AGAINST INFLUENCE OF POPULAR LEADERS AND PARTIES (Mt. 16:5-12; Mk. 8:13-21)
- A. Situation: Jesus and disciples sailed from Magadan-Dalmanutha, leaving the hyper-critical theologians behind. Having sailed without purchasing bread, they had only one loaf aboard.
- B. Jesus' cryptic warning: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod."
- C. The disciples' gross literalism: "He means the leaven of bread."
- D. Jesus' rebuke (16:8-11; Mk. 8:17-21)
1. Accusation of inadequate faith.
 2. Reproach for limited spiritual insight.
 3. Reminder of two stupendous miracles in the same area of their doubts.
 4. Repeated statement: "Not *bread*, but *leaven*!"
- E. The Apostles finally understand. (16:12)

III. JESUS TESTS HIS DISCIPLES ON HIS IDENTITY, SHOCKS THEM WITH NEWS OF HIS FUTURE SUFFERING AND DEMANDS SUPREME LOYALTY (16:13-28; Mk. 8:27—9:1; Lk. 9:18-27)

- A. The Good Confession (16:13-20; Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-21)
1. The disciples are questioned about public opinion.
 2. Popular answers reviewed.
 3. The disciples' answer given by Peter.
 4. Jesus' joy and promise to Peter.
 5. Secrecy required because of timing.
- B. The Way of the Cross (16:21-28; Mk. 8:31—9:1; Lk. 9:22-27)
1. Revelation of Jesus' Approaching Death.
 2. Peter's rebuke of Jesus
 3. Jesus' rebuke of Peter.
 4. Jesus demands absolute loyalty and unflinching self-sacrifice as the cost of discipleship in the Kingdom.

THE LITERARY UNITY OF THIS CHAPTER

Beyond the fairly tight chronological connections evident in Matthew's narration of the events in this chapter, there are deeper, theological ties that bind the internal sections together in a marvelous unity. Although there are many interesting side-trails to follow, there is but one major problem in focus throughout the entire chapter: **THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIVINE CREDENTIALS.** This is clear from a consideration of the part each section plays to bring this major theme to the fore:

1. Popular leaders and parties demand divine credentials, as if all previous signs Jesus had given were either non-existent or unworthy. Jesus repulsed their demand because of the adequacy of previously given evidences. The resurrection-sign was repeated as a credential to be waited for. (16:1-4)
2. Jesus then warned against the doctrinal influence of popular leaders and parties who had rejected the evidential value of divine credentials, and reminded His men of the divine credentials exhibited in the feeding of the 5000 and of the 4000. The Apostles themselves were in danger of forgetting the implications of His divine credentials. He rebuked them as men of little faith and limited understanding, since they had as yet failed to comprehend the grand significance of His stupendous miracles of creation. (16:5-12)

3. Jesus then tested the Twelve about His identity, as if to say, "What have the divine credentials proven to you about me?" (16:13-20)
 - a. Various popular answers were given, because people in general were unwilling to admit the implications of divine identity evidenced by Jesus' credentials. That is, if Peter is especially blessed because he accepted what God revealed through Jesus' divine credentials, then the people who thought Jesus to be Elijah, John the Baptist or Jeremiah, must have done so because of their unwillingness to discern that the signs given them pointed to Jesus as God's Messiah. Despite opinions that accepted Him as a prophet, Jesus is not satisfied with being taken for anything less than what His credentials revealed Him to be.
 - b. Jesus blessed Peter for following the leading of the divine credentials.
 - c. He then provided further prophetic credentials: He would build His Church, and Peter would have the keys of the Kingdom. This too would prove His identity, for what if He should fail to fulfil either of these promises?
4. Jesus then tested the disciples' real grasp of the implications of the divine credentials by giving them unwelcome, but essential, revelations. Peter's discipleship was immediately thrown into crisis because of his refusal to accept unpleasant truth, however valid for him Jesus' credentials might have been. (16:21-26) Any man's discipleship, in fact, is valid only to the extent that he accepts the cross-revelations, and thus implicitly embraces the implications of the divine credentials of Jesus who requires that he so believe.
5. Concluding signs to warn and comfort His disciples (16:27, 28)
 - a. A future sign that would undoubtedly establish Jesus' identity beyond all doubt for everyone, which, however, would come too late for anyone to be able to make any changes on the basis of it: the Second Coming of Christ in glory to judge every man. (16:27)
 - b. A future sign that would also establish Jesus' identity and could help to convince the ones who were slow to believe: the glorious beginning of Christ's Kingdom on earth, a fact which would occur in the lifetime of Jesus' followers. (16:28)

Although Matthew has been gently leading his readers to some critically examined conclusions about Jesus, as we have seen in earlier chapters, he cannot have been unaware of the potential effect this

chapter would produce in the heart of his readers, if they have followed him this far. Some of his material is absolutely unique, being omitted by either Mark or Luke. Although there are substantial, theological lessons implicit in the progression of events in this chapter, we must not accuse the Publican-Apostle of being an innovative theologian, because he does not superimpose a theology about Jesus onto the facts. Rather, by means of his narration of the facts he permits his theology to shine through. This is the way that he too learned the majestic identity of Jesus of Nazareth, and now he offers his readers the same privilege. As the Holy Spirit leads him to include each section with his own variations (i.e. differences from Mark and Luke), the Apostle pushes his reader to ask himself: what do *I* think about Jesus? What do His divine credentials say to *me*? Am I willing to stake everything I have on Him? Dare I too believe that He alone will judge me in the end? As in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew again leaves Jesus' magnificent challenge ringing in the ears of his hearers, without telling us what each chose to do about it. After all, what *they* did is not so important. What counts is, what must I do about these same divine credentials historically recorded and presented to me in this way?

Section 39

JESUS REFUSES TO GIVE ADDITIONAL SIGNS TO DOUBTERS

(Parallel: Mark 8:10-12)

TEXT: 15:39b—16:4

39 And he sent away the multitudes, and entered into the boat, and came into the borders of Magadan. 16:1 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and trying him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But he answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather: for the heaven is red.* 3 And in the morning, *It will be foul weather today: for the heaven is red and lowering.* Ye know how to discern the face of the heaven; but ye cannot *discern* the signs of the times. 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of Jonah. And he left them and departed.