

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.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think the Sadducees would join with the Pharisees in bringing this attack against Jesus?
- b. What was there in Jesus' ministry or message that collided with Sadducean tenets?
- c. What, in your opinion, is the meaning of the religious leaders' demand: did they want Him to work *more* miracles than He had already done? Did they want *more stupendous* miracles? What do you think they expected?
- d. Mark says Jesus refused to give any sign to these Jewish leaders, while Matthew affirms that He gave the sign of Jonah. Which is right? How do you know?
- e. Why is the Pharisees and Sadducees' question important to us today?
 - (1) Why is it important precisely as asked by these theologians?
 - (2) Why is it important as Jesus answered it, but not as intended by those leaders?
- f. In your opinion, what forced these religious leaders to reject or ignore the evidence of all of Jesus' other miracles as "signs" of His identity and consequent authority?
- g. Today, would we be tempted by obstacles in our minds which are similar to those in the minds of the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus? If so, how? If not, why not?
- h. Does the expression "the signs of the times" have anything to do with current events in our day? Why do you answer as you do?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Immediately following the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus boarded a boat with His disciples and sailed for the region of Magadan-Dalmanutha. It was there that the Pharisees and Sadducees approached Jesus together and began an argument with Him. To put Him to the test, they told Him to demonstrate the authority of His ministry by showing them a special signal from God.

Sighing deeply within Himself, Jesus answered them, "When night falls, you say, 'It will be fine weather, for the sky is red.' In the morning you observe, 'It will be stormy today, because the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the look of the sky, and yet you cannot interpret the most obvious signs given in our times?! Why

are these people always asking for more evidence? It is only an evil, unfaithful people that demands more proof! Furthermore, I tell you no other demonstration of my authority shall be provided these people, except 'the sign of Jonah.' "

Jesus left them, boarded the boat again with His Apostles and sailed for the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

SUMMARY

Jesus dismissed the Decapolis crowds and sailed west to Magadan-Dalmanutha. There, representatives of both religious parties, Pharisees and Sadducees, demanded that He produce some special miracle to prove His right to speak authoritatively for God. But Jesus' answer showed that, given their native ability to interpret weather signs, they ought to be able to interpret something as clear and evident as the miracles He had already done that identified Him as God's spokesman. Only those unfaithful to God and fundamentally evil could dare ask for more evidence when enough had already been given to convince less biased people. Nor would further, special evidence be given, other than Jesus' resurrection. Then Jesus turned His back on His attackers and strode back to the boat.

NOTES

15:39b **And he entered into the boat, and came into the borders of Magadan.** If He embarked on the Decapolis side of the Sea of Galilee (see notes on 15:29) where He fed the 4000, then **the borders of Magadan** (Dalmanutha, Mk. 8:9) would be sought on the western lakeshore, or possibly on the far south side. Presumably, He would normally have walked to any site on the eastern shore, unless impelling reasons forced Him to do otherwise, i.e. reasons such as those surrounding the abrupt conclusion of the feeding of the 5000. Unfortunately, positive identification of Magadan-Dalmanutha is lacking today.

A. THE CHRIST CHALLENGED (16:1)

16:1 For fuller notes on the ideas contained in this section, see

comments under 12:38-40. **Pharisees and Sadducees came:** what were these bitter, long-time rivals for the religio-political control of the Jewish mind, doing TOGETHER? This unholy coalition is as unlikely a union of forces as could be imagined. (See Special Study on these sects at the end of chapter 15 and on 16:6.) Here they temporarily join forces to battle a common enemy. In fact, Jesus' supernatural message radically threatened the Pharisees' preference for human traditions. (See on 15:1-20.) Again, His attacks on profitable Sadducean rackets in the Temple (cfr. Jn. 2:13-18) and His teaching about resurrection, angels, spirits and other supernatural phenomena supported the Pharisean views against the Sadducees; consequently, these latter felt menaced. Politically, neither could ignore Him, because the common people heard Him gladly. (Jn. 4:40-42, 45; Mk. 1:36-38 = Lk. 4:42f; Mt. 4:23f; Lk. 4:15; 6:17; Mt. 7:28—8:1; Lk. 15:1; Mk. 10:1; Lk. 19:48 = Mk. 11:18; 12:37; Lk. 21:38) They must react with speed and efficiency or lose their grip on the nations, even if later they must battle it out with each other for supremacy in their incessant power struggle.

From the standpoint of their official responsibility to protect the flock of Israel from false prophets, it was their proper duty to demand precisely such evidence as they now require of Him. (Cf. Dt. 18:9-22; Jn. 2:18f; Mt. 12:38ff; Lk. 11:16, 29f) Whereas Jesus definitely dissected their motives and unmasked their lack of moral qualifications to judge Him (Cf. Mt. 21:23-27 and parallels), He never objected to the request when made honestly with the intention to know.

Trying Him: i.e. not a court trial, because the impression left by Matthew and Mark is that Jesus and His group never got far from their boat beached on the shore after disembarking, before these theologians made their attack. Rather, this is but one more attempt to discredit Him publicly by challenging Him to provide credentials they hoped He did not possess. Such bloodless ordeals were the enemies' only real strategy short of the violence that surfaced in Jesus' final arrest and crucifixion. (Cf. Lk. 10:25; 11:53f; 14:1; Mt. 19:3 = Mk. 10:2; Mt. 22:15-40 and parallels.) Their intention not to accept whatever evidence He might give is evident in their argumentative spirit in which they approached Him. (Mk. 8:11)

Asked him to show them a sign from heaven. From heaven probably means from God: what did they expect? Fire to fall, unconsumed burning bushes, great plagues, suns standing still, moons turning into blood, hail from a cloudless sky, voices from the Throne? But

that this demand, while formally correct, is really hypocritical, may be seen against the background of those who formulated it:

1. From the Sadducees' point of view, no such supernatural interventions would really take place. However, if the ignorant populace and the hated Pharisees want to believe in such, then let the Nazarene discredit Himself in the eyes of His followers by failing to produce them!
2. From the Pharisees' standpoint, *He* of all people, could not do them, because God would not sanction nor authenticate the message or ministry of one who regularly contradicted their cherished traditions and standard messianic notions, so certain were they of the divine approval of their views. (See notes on 15:2; cf. Jn. 9:16f, 24-34)

Although they secretly desired His public exposure as a fraud, the form of their demand suggests that they expected to see some feat of such supernatural proportions that they could do nothing but believe.

B. CHRIST CRITICIZES THE CRITICS' CONSPICUOUS CALLOUSNESS (16:2, 3)

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 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. The textual validity of these verses should be noticed: did Matthew write them, or did some scribe copy them into his text from elsewhere? Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 41) informs us:

The external evidence for the absence of these words is impressive, including Aleph, B, f13, 157, *al.* syr^{c,s}, cop^{sa,bo}, arm, Origen, and, according to Jerome, most manuscripts known to him (though he included the passage in the Vulgate). The question is how one ought to interpret this evidence. Most scholars regard the passage as a later insertion from a source similar to Lk. 12:54-56, or from the Lukan passage itself, with an adjustment concerning the particular signs of the weather. On the other hand, it can be argued . . . that the words were omitted by copyists in climates (e.g. Egypt) where red sky in the morning

does not announce rain. In view of the balance of these considerations it was thought best to retain the passage enclosed within square brackets.

Beyond Metzger's conclusion, it is well to note that Luke's Gospel cannot be the source for Matthew's 16:2, 3, because of the following considerations. In the actual weather information (Mt. 16:2b, 3a; Lk. 12:54b, 55) there are 39 Greek words that neither Evangelist shares in common with the other, out of a total of 52 words thought to be parallel. In the rebuke (Mt. 16:3b; Lk. 12:56b), despite some parallels of thought, only 2 Greek words are actually parallel in the two Gospels (*dè* and *ou!*), out of a total for both Gospels of 31 words! One must pronounce the two passages in question as relatively similar in thought, but hardly verbatim repetitions to the extent that one should be thought the literary origin of the other. Because the omission of these verses is easier to account for than is their insertion, their probable authenticity is the better conclusion.

The particular weather signs mentioned by Jesus are characteristic of Palestine. The particular meteorological phenomena in other places might well be different. The Lord is arguing this point with dwellers in Palestine to whom these data would be common knowledge. He is not describing world-wide meteorological information. Had copyists realized this, they would have been less ready to suppress these verses, expunging them from the text.

Rather than meet their challenge with a blazing burst of supernatural power, Jesus refused to grant them additional signs. His reasons are multiple:

1. Because they already possessed abundant and conclusive evidence, but deliberately misread it. Jesus' criticism, spoken as it was in deep sorrow of spirit (Mk. 8:12), has a light touch of satire in it which is neither coarse, cruel nor brutal: "You are experts at seeing the cause-and-effect relationships in the natural world, yet you cannot discern the same kind of relationships in the very area where you claim to be authorities, i.e. in the world of the spirit, signs and God! You thereby disqualify yourselves to ask me for signs." Though naturally able to read so undependable an indicator as that of the weather, yet they were wilfully blind to the more numerous and far more certain signs Jesus had already furnished. This explains their obvious lack of moral qualification to demand more evidence when their own epoch was replete with

signs as yet unread or deliberately misinterpreted by them.

They had demanded a **sign from heaven**, so He bases His rebuttal on their wording. His answer repeats **heaven** (*ouranòs*) three times as if to say: "The very heaven whence you demand that my proof must come, condemns you for making such an ultimatum, for if you can predict weather on the basis of its observable phenomena, you could also decide about me on the basis of the observable phenomena that characterize this age: the mission and message of John the Baptist, as well as my own ministry and miraculous works predicted by John."

They already possessed **the signs of the times**, i.e. the evidence that they were then living in the days of the Messiah. These are the same evidences that continued to convince the Apostles and other open-minded people that Jesus was really God's Anointed. (Cf. 16:16f) The difference in ability to decide about the signs, therefore, lay not in the miracles themselves, but in the beholder. To what extent would each single observer determine to grasp, or release, his prejudices in favor of new truth? Consider:

- a. What could be more indicative than the spiritual revival of the nation during the ministry of John the Baptist? (Cf. 3:5, 6; Jn. 5:35; Mt. 11:7ff)
- b. What more spectacular indication of God's merciful presence and approval of Jesus' ministry could be desired than instant healing of so many and so varied human diseases, raising of the dead or multiplying food, as Jesus Himself did? (Cf. Mt. 12:28)
- c. What could stir the Hebrew heart more deeply than the evidence that the ancient prophecies were now being fulfilled in often surprisingly new, but certain ways? (Cf. Jn. 1:45; Mt. 11:4, 5)
- d. What could be more surprising than the sheer multiplicity of His signs? (See on Jn. 7:31!)

The Lord rightly insists on the word *signs*, although He could have referred to His mighty works as "wonders" or "miracles," because these deeds are not important merely for their mere display of supernatural might, but primarily because of that which they signify; God's gracious mercy at work among men to deliver them from their various bondages. This observation fully justifies Jesus' damning the disbelievers, because of their hypocritical claim to be unable to detect the hand of God at work in Jesus' miracles of mercy, redemption and healing. (Cf. Mt. 12:22-36) Their demand, as well as Jesus' reference to previous miracles, shows that the previous miraculous deeds of the Christ had not convinced them,

although they had been objectively both countless and conclusive. This inability to see God at work in anything He had done previously is but the old sin against the Holy Spirit all over again. (Mt. 12)

2. Another motive for His refusal to provide further signs is the evidential value of all preceding miracles. The endless multiplication of one's credentials will never convince the doubters, if the first copy be rejected. Why should Jesus appear to downgrade His own preceding demonstrations of divine power, by no longer mentioning their evidential force, while, at the same time, producing miraculous works that would, hopefully, win over the skeptics now? Had He done so, it might have been thought that there were something unworthy, unreal or unacceptable about all that He had done previously. No, there comes a time when the skeptic must face the adequacy of the evidence God gives, and either bow before it or else deny himself, saying he did not see what, in fact, he saw. **The signs of the times** were really sufficient, had they but eyes to see it. First, let them interpret the signs already given, before coming to demand others!
3. A third motive for refusing to grant them a sign was the fact that He had already conceded them a spectacular sign: "**the sign of Jonah.**" (Mt. 12:39f) Here the Lord put these callous critics on trial, because, on their own premises, they must actually await the verification of the sign He gave. So, by giving them **THIS** sign which promised His own future resurrection, He literally beat them at their own game. Technically, therefore, He was under no obligation to furnish any immediately verifiable miracle. Nevertheless, by reminding them of even this sign, He tested their conscience: would they finally admit the weight of ANY God-given proof of His identity and consequent authority? Or would they continue to reject the obvious direction of all His evidence? It is now their **CONSCIENCE**, not their intellectual equipment, that is put on trial.
4. Another motive for not granting the demanded credentials, although not mentioned in our text, lies in the very nature of Christian discipleship.
 - a. Had Jesus shown them a heaven full of angels with a vision of the Son of man as glorious as the sun, a heavenly exhibition of such magnitude and glory as to exceed their wildest expectations, would this have produced in them the kind of faith He expects in His disciples? If the discipleship of Jesus is to be founded upon a faith that trusts Him on the basis of the evidence He grants, and does not whine to behold His glory as triumphant

and realized (cf. 1 Pt. 1:8; Jn. 20:29), is it psychologically probable that they would have been great believers, had He actually granted their wish?

- b. And if faith is to be founded upon evidence that can be verified, but yet must have some unseen, yet hoped-for object, for it to be faith (Heb. 11:1; Ro. 8:24f; 2 Co. 4:18; 5:7), how could a celestial demonstration foster real faith, if its effects would have been so imposing on the mind as to render unbelief so impossible that the denial of the evidence would be absolute folly? If Jesus had rendered faith really impossible, how could He hope to consider the witnesses of such a supernatural extravaganza as believers or disciples? They would not be believers, for they would know what now in this life they must yet believe, trusting the evidence to be true.
- c. Further, if faith is to be a personal, free decision, then overwhelming revelations of such magnitude that would nullify the power or reality of personal decision, eliminates each man's free will. This would make God responsible for their salvation, since none could refuse to follow Jesus. It would also compromise God's impartiality by representing Him as granting overpowering evidence to some and not to all, as saving some against their will and despite their lack of personal faith, and as damning the rest to whom He gave no such overwhelming evidence.

C. CONCESSION OF CONVINCING COUNTEREVIDENCE TO CULMINATE CHRIST'S CLAIMS (16:4)

16:4 **An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.** His analysis was two-pronged:

1. They were **evil**, because they were deliberately evading the plain evidence of His previous miracles which revealed God's will. They resisted the force of empirical proof upon their minds, although it was such evidence as would appeal to the unbiased researcher. What kind of mentality does it take to be far more impressed by thunderbolts from heaven, than by the restoring of usefulness to earth's suffering humanity? or by fire from heaven, than by miraculous provision of food to feed thousands of hungry and tired men and women? Their hypocrisy revealed itself in their despising the credentials that God had ordered and in demanding other evidence more in line with their own dictates.

2. They were **adulterous**, or unfaithful, because they loved something other than God. They were not seeking God's will and approval. (Jn. 5:38-47) Their disposition proved they did not adore God: they bowed before the false gods of their own mind, their own concepts of what God's will and God's Messiah must be. They flattered themselves to be wiser than John the Baptist or Jesus. (Cf. Mt. 11:7-19)

There shall no sign be given unto it. What they lacked was not a *sign*, but sight, i.e. the desire to see the obvious. But these men were blind to the moral glory of the Lord. In fact, in contrast to the capricious weather signs, His were not at all difficult to fathom, if the heart of the interpreter be good and honest. (Cf. Lk. 8:15) The very moral character of Jesus' miracles, demonstrating the fact that a holy, loving God was at work in the person of His Son, tests the character and conscience of the observers. Since every type of truth has its own proper evidence by which it is demonstrated, Christ and His truth must be verified by the proper proof. Rather than be tested by mathematical or musical evidence, the truth of Jesus and Christianity has a double foundation: a historical, or empirical, foundation, and a moral base. But, if the critics themselves are not morally qualified or capable of judging the evidences, they will never see the meaning of His signs, regardless of how strong the historical evidences might be. Not even the best evidence can win over those who have stubbornly decided not to be convinced!

The simple fact that Jesus refused to work a miracle in the presence of His enemies is no sign of weakness or inability. Rather, it evidences His confidence in the adequacy and validity of the miracles already provided, as well as of the prophetic sign He did give. Any imposter can also refuse to furnish credentials to his critics, but only a real prophet can risk his reputation on the precise fulfilment of a future sign, since the imposter who attempts the same is only postponing his own day of reckoning and exposure as a fraud. Also, His refusal to be bullied or frightened into rash miracles is proof of His self-mastery.

No sign . . . but the sign of Jonah. Apparently, on this occasion the Lord did not explain the sense of the prediction, as He had done earlier. (Cf. Mt. 12:39f) Rather, He simply refers back to it. Not only were the former miracles enough; what He had already told them was enough too! Why keep adding word upon word to convince the wilfully deaf? When He had given them *the sign of Jonah* in the past, He had furnished EVERYTHING they really demanded and needed.

So, this time He just dropped the enigmatic sign in their midst to discuss among themselves. Its very obscurity and its importance as a sign such as they demanded would have spurred them on to debate its meaning until its future fulfilment made its meaning understandable. Then, when the Apostles began preaching the resurrection of Jesus as an indisputable fact, the realization that He had furnished them such unforeseeable information in advance would surprise them with factual evidence that He had known all along what no mere human could have known. This fact throws light on the depth of the leaders' obstinance and guilt when, despite their inability to answer the Apostles' affirmations and proof, they continued to reject Jesus as Israel's Messiah.

This exception ("*no sign . . . but that of Jonah*") is no new method being attempted after all other signs had seemingly failed to convince the skeptics, because . . .

1. Jesus had not failed. THEY had failed to admit what other impartial witnesses could see.
2. This exception, i.e. the proof inherent in Jesus' resurrection, is the proper climax of all His other signs, since a permanently dead miracle-worker is less startling evidence of divine approbation than is a resurrected Lord.
3. This exception underlines once again Jesus' patience. In infinite mercy, He continues to leave them evidence when, according to strict justice, they deserved no more.
4. When Jesus originally gave them this sign, it was sufficient then, and it is sufficient now, no matter how impatient they be to see its realization. Therefore, in the future moment when it would have been fulfilled, they would then be basing their conviction upon evidence already given prior to the resurrection, thus upon evidence they possessed even at this moment. So, let them believe that.
5. On the previous occasion they had not insisted that the sign come "from heaven," as they now required. Nevertheless, by referring them back to the sign of the resurrection, He is giving them precisely what they asked for. Since the resurrection of Jesus would be brought about by the direct intervention of God, rather than by any human agency, this proof would be exactly what they now had requested: "from heaven."

This man, whose voice condemned the traditionalism of the Pharisees and whose miracles damned the antisupernaturalistic rationalism of the Sadducees, would be silenced in death by these very clergymen.

But He would rise from the dead to wreck their rationalism by His resurrection and topple their traditionalism and theories by His truth. This was His sign, but they must wait for its fulfilment.

And he left them and departed. For the man or group that refuses to recognize God's hand in all that Jesus was, did or taught, but obstinately insists that God furnish other reasons to believe, the only alternative remaining (short of immediate, judgmental punishment!) is to abandon such to their self-chosen fate. (Cf. Mt. 4:13; 10:14f; Ac. 13:44-51; Ro. 1:24, 26, 28; Jdg. 16:20; 1 Sam. 15:35; 16:14; 28:6; Dt. 31:17; 2 Kg. 21:14; 2 Ch. 15:2; 24:20; Psa. 78:60; Isa. 2:6) So, by the very act of turning on His heel and striding back to the boat, Jesus continued to instruct His disciples: that is, there comes a time even for Jesus Christ to leave the critics and their haggling. Not even the Lord would force their will not to believe. He refused even to render it impossible NOT to believe His precious truth! **He left them** His truth to do with it as they pleased. Now it was up to them to submit to the guidance of the light available to them, or stumble in the dark.

EVIDENCE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

This section underscores once more the absolutely inviolate freedom of the human will. The Pharisees and Sadducees were really free to accept or reject Jesus' revelations. God coerces no one to believe against his own will. However, He does furnish man with evidence that is the kind of proof that allows him to be voluntarily willing and obedient, the kind of evidence that is sufficiently convincing to encourage man to exercise his will and choose the right. But none is compelled against his will. The very certainty of God's evidence, however, gives a moral quality to man's decision about it. And yet, if man cannot come to God by his own power or on his own terms, neither is he forced by irresistible evidence. Still, the light is sufficient. Therefore, men who love darkness rather than light because their lives are evil, deserve the condemnation that is theirs. (Jn. 3:16-21) Responsibility is always commensurate with the opportunities to know the truth and the favor enjoyed.

APPLICATIONS

SHALL WE PUT GOD TO FURTHER, USELESS TESTS, OR ACCEPT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVIDENCES ALREADY FURNISHED? In what way(s) is it possible for us to demand signs from God in this same illegitimate way? The analogy between our situation and that of those who lived in Jesus' time consists in recognizing that:

1. To us, as to them, have been already granted multitudinous motives for deciding whether or not God has really spoken through Jesus of Nazareth.
2. To us, as to them, falls the responsibility for weighing the evidences and letting ourselves be guided by their force and direction, be it material or moral.
3. Neither we nor they have the right to pretend OTHER proof DIFFERENT from what has already been granted. Rather than criticize the proof, we must examine the heart that will not admit such proof.
4. We too, like they, may have personal or group prejudices that block our ready acceptance of something God says that seems unreasonable, unreal or otherwise unacceptable. Nevertheless, we too humbly submit ourselves in willing obedience to what is revealed to us, without complaining that God should give something other than what He has.

THEREFORE:

When we sigh for miracles to give us more confidence, ignoring those ancient demonstrations that authenticate our faith once and for all, or when we are reasonably certain about a given duty and yet remain unmoved, hoping earnestly that God will provide some spiritual light or emotional stimulation that would blast us into action, then we are demanding that God prove to us what we should already admit. We are haggling over a sign when we already possess sufficient reasons and guidance for moving out in obedience.

We must not let ourselves be hindered by the fact that there is always a multiplicity of opinions and differences of interpretation regarding every Christian duty. Rather, we must ask ourselves why some cannot see the truth involved in such questions, and seek to know that truth for ourselves with a view to obeying it.

He who chooses to remain in doubt, after all that God has said and done to convince the common man, acts in bad faith and merits what he will get! When, in order to justify some decision, we say,

"If God would just give me some sign, then I would do what He says," we are putting Him to unnecessary tests, and fall under the just condemnation of Jesus! Rather than fall victim to the temptation to say, "Oh, if God would just give me some further sign, assuring me of His will regarding some choice I must make, I would be happier, surer, more willing to do my duty," let us walk in the light we have, by faith, not by sight.

The original readers of Matthew's Gospel had to decide whether to put God to further, useless tests, demanding more proof of Jesus' Messiahship, or embrace the evidence already furnished. Can we, will we, decide about His revelations to us?

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus come from and what had He done just before boarding the boat to sail for Magadan?
2. Locate Magadan-Dalmanutha geographically on the basis of the information in the text.
3. Who are the Sadducees? What is their theological position in Judaism?
4. What does this collusion between the Pharisees and Sadducees against Jesus prove about them? What was their more usual attitude toward each other?
5. What was the semi-official position in Judaism of the Pharisees and Sadducees which would require of them that they ask precisely the question they now place before Jesus?
6. What is a "sign"? What part did signs play in the identification of God's messengers? What are "the signs of the times" to which Jesus made reference? What are "the times" intended?
7. What was Jesus' inner reaction to this request for signs? (Mark 8:12)
8. Harmonize the differing answers reported by Matthew and Mark: "No sign shall be given this generation," and "No sign shall be given it, except the sign of Jonah." How can both answers be correct?
9. Explain Jesus' point in mentioning the reading of weather signs. Are these weather signs mentioned universal, i.e. true all over the world?
10. Explain the "sign of Jonah." On what other occasion did Jesus explain its meaning?

11. On what other occasions did people request signs of Jesus and what answers did He give them?
13. Explain the peculiar immorality of asking for signs in the spirit in which this was done by the Jewish theologians.

Section 40

JESUS WARNS DISCIPLES AGAINST INFLUENCE OF POPULAR LEADERS AND PARTIES

(Parallel: Mark 8:13-26)

TEXT: 16:5-12

5 And the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread. 6 And Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, We took no bread. 8 And Jesus perceiving it said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have no bread? 9 Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 11 How is it that ye do not perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 12 Then understood they that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How do you harmonize the apparently conflicting reports that the disciples "forgot to take bread," (Matthew) and "they had only one loaf with them in the boat" (Mark)?
- b. What was there that was so dangerous about the influence of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod that Jesus needed to make so specific and so stern a warning to His disciples against it? Deal with the influence of each group separately.
- c. What "leaven" did Herod have? (cf. Mark 8:15) He was no religious teacher! Or was he, in a certain sense, one whose views