

TAKE TWO

Mark 8:1-26

Mark 8:1-26 highlights two things: 1) the intensifying conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees and 2) the disciples' continuing difficulty in grasping Jesus' true nature.

There are three preliminary issues that are key to understanding this passage:

1. The O.T. concept of “a sign”.
2. Jewish messianic expectation.
3. Framing.

Old Testament Concept of “a sign”

God promised to send a prophet like Moses to Israel.¹ This is why some people asked if Jesus was “the Prophet” (John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40).²

Deuteronomy 18:15–22 (ESV)

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’²¹ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’—²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

To be validated, a prophet had to make a near term prediction that was then fulfilled. The prediction and fulfillment were “a sign” potentially verifying that this prophet spoke for Yahweh. There is a second test for prophets contained in Deuteronomy 13:1-5.

Deuteronomy 13:1–5 (ESV)

¹ “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.⁵ But

¹ Cf. Exodus 12:6-8 Moses was unique in that God spoke to him “mouth to mouth”, that is, face to face.

² Jesus was “the Prophet” of Deuteronomy 18.

that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

The second test is loyalty to Yahweh. Does the prophet teach obedience to Yahweh? The supernatural sign of a near term prediction and fulfillment can be mimicked by Satan. The validation of a true prophet of Yahweh required both the sign of a near term prediction fulfilled **and** loyalty to Yahweh.

In our passage, the Pharisees come to Jesus seeking “a sign from heaven”. They were seeking to put Him to the tests of Deuteronomy 18 and 13. They were not seeking truth; they were attempting to trap Jesus.

This leads to a second introductory issue – Jewish messianic expectations.

Jewish Messianic Expectations

Many of us wonder that the Jews rejected Jesus in light of His many miracles. His claim to deity was the issue. The Jews were looking for a thoroughly human messiah, not God taking on humanity. Although numerous Old Testament passages reveal the divine nature of Messiah (Psalm 110:1; Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2-5) the scribes and Pharisees interpreted these passages in such a way as to deny the divine nature of Messiah.

A god becoming a man or a man becoming a god were pagan concepts anathema to the Jews. The Hebrew Shema declares, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” *No amount of evidence would convince the scribes and Pharisees that God had taken on humanity in the person of Jesus.* It was impossible and blasphemous.

This is the critical point to keep in mind for when the Pharisees badgered Jesus to perform a “sign from heaven” it was not to validate the trustworthiness of Jesus, but to make a case for His execution.

The last introductory item has to do with the deliberate way in which John Mark framed this passage.

Framing of Mark 8:1-21

For the time being, notice that the healing of the *deaf* man precedes this passage (7:31-37) and the healing of the *blind* man (with a twist) concludes this passage (8:22-26).

With these preliminaries in mind, let’s proceed with the feeding of the four thousand.

JESUS FEEDS FOUR THOUSAND (8:1-9)

Mark 8:1-9 (ESV)

¹ In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ² “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³ And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” ⁴ And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these

people with bread here in this desolate place?" ⁵ And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶ And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. ⁷ And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸ And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

It is important to remember that this is the second miracle feeding (cf. 6:35-44). Both feeding miracles revealed *Jesus to be the divine Messiah and Shepherd of Israel* (Ezek. 34:11-24; Micah 5:2-5).

It is surprising that on this second occasion it did not occur to the disciples that Jesus was fully capable of feeding the crowd. The fact that it didn't occur to them reveals their lack of understanding regarding Jesus' true nature. It emphasizes the difficulty the disciples had perceiving the meaning of these events.

Dismissing the crowd, Jesus and the disciples set sail for the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

JESUS REFUSES TO GIVE THE PHARISEES "A SIGN" (8:10-13)

Mark 8:10-13 (ESV)

¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. ¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." ¹³ And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

As we now know, the Pharisees were not seeking another miracle; they did not dispute Jesus' supernatural powers. Nor were they seeking the sign to verify that Jesus was from God. They had already concluded and were teaching that Jesus was demon-possessed and performing miracles by the power of Satan (3:22).

The call for a sign was a trap.

The cunning of their scheme was that if Jesus submitted to the test of giving a *sign from heaven* in the form of a near term prediction and fulfilment, the Pharisees could then condemn Him on the basis of Deuteronomy 13. Jesus, a man, was claiming to be God (2:5, 28). According to the Pharisees' misinterpretation of the Scriptures the idea of God becoming a man was blasphemous. According to their erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures, they could condemn Jesus for attempting to lead the nation to worship a false god. Given that Jesus was calling the crowds to follow Him, the Pharisees would accuse Jesus of being a false prophet leading the nation to worship a false god (Deut. 13:2-3). The punishment for a false prophet was death (Deut. 13:5).

Jesus refused the test, disengaged and set sail to the other side of the lake.

While sailing Jesus was talking with His disciples about the confrontation with the Pharisees. In the course of this conversation, Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.

JESUS REBUKES HIS DISCIPLES (8:14-21)

¹⁴ Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"

¹⁸ *Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?*

And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." ²¹ And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

Jesus warned His disciples against the evil disposition of the Pharisees (and Herod) who had asked Him for a sign even though their minds were already made up and a sign would not have changed their minds.

The disciples completely missed Jesus' meaning as evidenced by their discussion about the lack of bread.

Jesus rebuked His disciples for being spiritually blind and deaf. They had not understood the spiritual significance of the miracle feedings. Certainly, on one hand, it meant they never need worry about having enough to eat, but far more importantly those two miracles revealed Jesus to be Messiah and Shepherd. There was no need for "a sign" in order to be convinced. The evidence was abundant and clear for those with the spiritual eyes and ears to see, hear and understand.

But the disciples were struggling to understand.

They were like the dear man of the Decapolis (7:31-37) and the blind man of Bethsaida.

JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN (8:22-26)

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

Bethsaida was on the northeastern shore of the Lake. Folks there brought a blind man to Jesus.

Twice Jesus laid His hands on the man's unseeing eyes.

Twice the disciples picked up the leftovers of a miraculous meal.

After the second touch, the man saw clearly.

After the second feeding, will the disciples see clearly?

THINGS TO PONDER

Jesus is fully God and fully man.

The Bible teaches that there is one divine nature (deity) fully possessed by three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Personhood* is not the same as possessing a body. A *person* possesses intellect, will and emotion, but not necessarily a physical body. The divine nature is characterized by such attributes as self-existence, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, perfection, immutability.

At the Incarnation, the Son, the second person of the Godhead, took to Himself a fully human nature including a human body without diminishing His divine nature. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is fully God and fully man. He is unique in all the universe. There is no one like Him. This is the glorious truth about Jesus that the Pharisees rejected and the disciples struggled to, but eventually came to understand.

Self-inflicted blindness?

We can tend to be harsh in our criticism of the disciples struggle to understand Jesus. But our criticism should be tempered by the fact that these men were the product of first century Jewish theology taught them in the synagogue by their rabbis. The disciples did not own personal copies of the Scriptures to study on their own. The misinterpretation of the messianic prophecies were the standard interpretations taught in their synagogues. Theirs was a paradigm shift of epic proportions.

We, on the other hand, are awash in Bibles, commentaries and internet resources. Are we taking advantage of these resources and studying the Scriptures? Or is our blindness self-inflicted?

We have great resources in our discipleship resource center in the foyer. A Home Fellowship is also a great place to study the Scriptures with your brothers and sisters.

May we all be growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ!