

# MARK 8

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## **Mark 8:1–10. Feeding the Four Thousand**

*The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 465–473.*

In these verses, Jesus is determined to feed the crowd because, in some sense, He is the cause of their lack of food—their decision to remain with Him and hear His teaching has placed them in this situation. The disciples' question in verse 4 can appear surprising since they, according to Mark's record, had already experienced a similar situation (see Mark 6:31–52), but we should recall that “they considered not the miracle of the loaves” (6:52). While they likely remembered the previous incident, clearly they had not understood its significance. Jesus will later use this as a teaching opportunity (see 8:13–21). The number seven, which appears here three times (verses 5–6, 8), has a symbolic meaning of completeness or perfection, suggesting that Jesus can provide as much as is needed.

## **Mark 8:11–21. Failure to Understand Jesus's Miracles**

*The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 474–482.*

The implication of the Pharisees' request is that they do not believe Jesus's ministry, thus far, to be sufficient proof of His divine commission. “Sign” (Greek *semeion*) is never used in Mark for Jesus's miracles (unlike in the Gospel of John), showing that they have failed to truly see what Jesus has accomplished. The King James Version's “there shall no sign be given unto this generation” obscures the literal meaning of

the Greek, which is something more like, “If a sign would be given to this generation,” with the expected consequence left unstated. With this unsettled rhetorical flourish, Jesus leaves His questioners without fulfilling their request.

That the disciples forget the bread may be symbolic of their failure to grasp the significance of the miracle of loaves and fish. Jesus’s veiled warning about leaven hints at such a connection, and the disciples once again fail to comprehend the meaning—thinking He is upset that they have forgotten to bring more food. Jesus questions the softness of their hearts, which is preventing them from understanding, and His words in verse 18 concerning their inability to properly see or hear are especially pointed, as this episode is sandwiched between the healings of a deaf man (Mark 7:31–37) and of a blind man (8:22–26). But there is a glimmer of hope in the word “yet” (Greek *oupō*, 8:17 and 21 in some manuscripts), indicating that perhaps the disciples will eventually come to a full understanding.

### **Mark 8:22–26. Healing a Blind Man in Stages**

*The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 485–492.*

This miracle has caused difficulty for some, as the two-step healing seems to cast doubt on the effectiveness of Jesus’s healing power. However, this difficulty may be resolved if we view the two steps as symbolic and a deliberate part of Jesus’s lesson. Jesus has just compared His disciples’ inability to understand His mission to blindness (Mark 8:18); now He heals a man from blindness in stages. Similarly, in the very next passage, His disciples begin to understand who He is, but as subsequent events will reveal, this insight is still incomplete. The blind man’s healing, then, becomes an enacted symbol for the gradually increasing insight of the Twelve and for the expected increase in faith and understanding among all disciples generally who endure with Christ.

### **Mark 8:27–33. Revelation of Jesus’s Identity**

*The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 492–502.*

Caesarea Philippi was an important Roman cultic site, making it an interesting choice for this interview between Jesus and His disciples. Public opinion is divided about Jesus’s identity (some think He is John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other ancient prophet), but all recognize that Jesus is more than a normal man. While Jesus’s first question may be a straightforward inquiry, His second question is clearly a test of the disciples’ still developing insight. Peter answers with confidence, and his answer cuts through the

confusion straight to the truth. Peter's faith-filled confession, however, hides the fact that he, along with everyone else, has a misguided sense of what the Christ, or Messiah, would do. It is probably for this reason that Jesus insists that the disciples do not make this knowledge public, using the same strong word (Greek *epitimaō*) that He has used to rebuke demons.

Despite Peter's strong confession, the disciples still understand Jesus's mission somewhat hazily, like the blind man who at first only saw "men as trees, walking" (Mark 8:24). It will still be a great while before their vision becomes clear enough to grasp Jesus in His entirety. However, the interview at Caesarea Philippi seems to have convinced Jesus that the time is right to offer more insight, and so for the first time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that He "must suffer . . . be rejected . . . be killed . . . and after three days rise again." While various messianic expectations were prevalent in first-century Judaism, virtually none of them anticipated a Messiah who would suffer and die.

For this reason, Peter takes Jesus aside to correct Him; he cannot stomach the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah. Jesus quickly puts an end to this: "Get thee behind me" reinforces that Peter is Jesus's disciple, not the other way around, and it is not Peter's responsibility to counsel Jesus. *Satan* is a Hebrew title (meaning "adversary, opponent, or accuser") rather than a personal name, and it is used here to label Peter as someone who is standing in the way of Jesus. The outburst is understandable; for the first time, Jesus has shared the painful, personal truth of what will happen to Him, and His revelation is met not with support, sympathy, or understanding but with rejection and disbelief.

### **Mark 8:34–9:1. The Need to Deny Oneself**

*The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 502–510.*

Jesus's statements to the crowd underscore the theme of discipleship. His declaration that each disciple must "take up his cross" has over the years become a figure of speech whose meaning has softened somewhat. To His contemporaries, these words would have been shockingly strong and violent. Discipleship to Christ is not just to follow Him but to willingly sacrifice one's own life. While Jesus's immediate audience may not have fully understood the reference to the cross, it is easy for the reader to see the foreshadowing of Jesus's Crucifixion.

The next idea, of saving one's life by losing it, is an example of the paradox presented by the death of Jesus. Just as we find life through His death, we too must allow our natural selves (the "natural man") to die if we are to inherit eternal life. It is also a response to Peter, who in an effort to save Jesus's life, tried to prevent Him from offering Himself as a sacrifice. The answer to Jesus's rhetorical question in verse 36 is, of course, nothing. Not even "the whole world" is a reward greater than one's eternal existence.

Mark 9:1 probably fits better at the end of chapter 8 than at the beginning of chapter 9. (The chapter divisions are not original to the text.) The fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy that some standing there would not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God come with power depends on what Jesus meant for the kingdom of God to come in power. It could refer, for example, to the transfiguration that is about to occur in the next verses, the death and Resurrection of Jesus, the establishment of the early Christian church after Jesus's Resurrection, or the coming of the kingdom of God in the millennial day (the translation of the Apostle John [see Doctrine and Covenants 7] would be the fulfillment in this last case).

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