

2. By finding her place in His mission to the Jews, she implicitly accepts the limitation of His personal mandate to that nation. Whereas Jesus had raised the objection that in a household the proper feeding order is first the children and then possibly the dogs (Mk. 7:27), never rightly reversed, she answered with the undoubted fact that, even before all the children's needs are met, the puppies are permitted a few crumbs CONTEMPORANEOUSLY with the feeding of the children. In this way she argues the rightness of her hope to be blessed even before Jesus completed His ministry to Israel. Therefore, she consents to God's limitations of His Messiah's mission to Israel. She has now learned what she needed to know.
3. She did not ask great things: only a *crumb* of His power. Whereas her request is of inestimable value to her, she pictures His bountiful power as so great that, by comparison, her request is really insignificant. This is genuine understanding of His power, because the common human impotence in the presence of demon-possession made anyone who could exorcize demons appear great, and yet she considers such a marvelous miracle as mere "crumbs" for Jesus.

This gallant woman acquiesced in everything He revealed, but persisted in finding her place in His plans. Because she kept bouncing back after each seeming rebuff, He was able to verify for all time the excellence of her faith, build her understanding, strengthen her faith, and, at the same time, justify His temporary stepping outside His strictly Hebrew role.

III. THE REWARDING OF FAITH (15:28; Mk. 7:29f)

15:28 **Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.** Mark (7:29) connects this response of Jesus directly with this indomitable woman's marvelously brilliant attitude: "He said to her, 'For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.' " Nothing conquers Jesus' heart faster than that faith that says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!" However, why should we think, with some, that Jesus allowed Himself to be worsted in argument, when He has been skillfully guiding her into this situation where she can rise in faith to this glorious conclusion? Plummer (*Matthew*, 217)

is right to say that

. . . He at once accepts her interpretation of the metaphor as proof of her insight and faith. With doglike perseverance she had excelled even the children in trust, and assuredly she might receive what the children would never miss.

Great is thy faith: by His treatment, Jesus had personally sounded the depth of this gallant woman's character, and His conclusion is well-founded:

1. Doubtless, her excellence of character had a great deal to do with the toughness of her faith. (See notes on 13:23.)
2. If her trust in Jesus at the beginning only thought of Him as a local Jewish Messiah, it has now grown to see all nations blessed by Israel's Christ, even if only as undeserving "dogs under the table." No one can rightly approach God without this fundamental understanding of his own need for grace.
3. Like the Gentile centurion, she also believed that Jesus could heal at a distance. (Cf. Notes on 8:5)
4. The Lord had thrown up barrier after barrier, yet she brilliantly hurdled them all with keen wit, steady resourcefulness and genuine humility and finally with real understanding of what Jesus taught about His mission.
5. Jesus' verdict is further vindicated by her instant obedience to His command to go home to find her daughter free from the demon.

Whether Jesus so intended it or not, this incident well illustrates the justice of His condemnation of Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. In fact, He had pointed out that, had those ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon enjoyed the opportunities for faith that the Galilean cities had known, the former would have long ago repented in deep humility. Whereas one example does not establish a rule, still she is genuinely typical of the joyous reception the Gospel later received among outcasts and pagans. (Cf. Ac. 8:4-8; 13:48; 16:34)

Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. Note Jesus' total confidence in His own authority over demons not even present. Without prayers, without orders directed to the demons, without exorcism, by the simple exercise of His mighty will, the distant demon leaves the girl.

Did Jesus' acquiescence to the woman's wishes constitute a contradiction of His own objection in v. 24?

1. No, because to help this one woman as an exception would not

interfere with His fundamental ministry to the Jews. Because it is truly an exception to the rule, it demonstrates the reality of the rule.

2. No, because Jesus had helped Gentiles before. (Mt. 8:5-13) Even if the strict wording of His divine mandate had read: "Jews only," He knows that God "desires mercy and not sacrifice." (See notes on 9:13; 12:7.)
3. No, because she had not asked Him to forsake the Jews that He might dedicate Himself exclusively to the Gentiles. She had requested only a little help for one Gentile.
4. No, because her present understanding and faith may be seen as qualifying her to become a real daughter of Abraham, the larger target of Jesus' mission. (See on 15:25.)

And her daughter was healed from that hour. i.e. *healed* of every symptom and result of demon possession. With characteristic confidence in Jesus, the lady went directly home, certain of the truth of His affirmation. Mark (7:30) narrates how she "found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone." It is unnecessary to interpret the Greek phrase *bebleménon epì tèn klinen* as referring to the violence with which the demon left, for this is a regular idiom for "lying in a bed." (Study Mt. 9:2; 8:6, 14 in Greek. Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 130; article *bállo*.)

If there had been any doubt in the mind of the Jewish reader about the rightness of the Messiah's dealings with a Canaanite woman, Jesus' instantaneous liberation of the demonized daughter is supernatural proof of His right to bless any Gentile He chooses, even if they be descendants of the cursed Hamitic race.

Why not start a collection of stories illustrating the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" that show how gently He dealt with foreigners and outcasts, like this Phoenician lady, the Roman centurion, the schismatic Samaritans (Jn. 4:7ff, 30, 39ff), and the excommunicated Hebrew (Jn. 9:35-37) and others?

LESSONS FOR APPLICATION

1. What this incident meant to race relations between Jews and Gentiles in the first century, it signifies for all race relations today too. If the severely limited Son of God can appreciate and bless this foreigner, a member of an accursed race, what of His followers

now freed from racial restrictions and specifically ordered to love and evangelize the whole world?

2. Jesus answered the believing request of this woman who was not even a member of the covenant people. Beware of believing that God must answer only the prayers of "our people," if He finds great faith outside the New Israel!
3. During His earthly ministry, Jesus chose to be guided by the methodological principle of His own Jewish Messiahship. This placed relative limits on what He could accomplish in terms of Gentile evangelization and blessing. Today, He has established spiritual guidelines by which He judges and blesses. Only those who align themselves with His plans, qualify themselves by faith, may hope to receive His bounty. He longs to bless men, but their dams of lack of faith and hope in His mercy hold back His generosity. If He chooses to distribute His gifts according to rules which He chooses not to disobey, who can complain? He is Lord. If man is disappointed with God's choices and wisdom, it is man's fault, not God's. This text, however, encourages us to bring our wants to Christ, however unworthy or unqualified we might be, but with a faith that lets God be God and lets His rules stand.
4. Morgan (*Matthew*, 203) exhorts: "In our relation to Jesus Christ as His messengers and workers, let us look for faith in unexpected places. Let us not keep out of Tyre and Sidon because there are no good people there. There is a freshness of faith everywhere waiting to surprise us if we will only venture to cross the line."
5. If God be determined to bless us, nothing can prevent us from receiving the answers to our prayers but our own unbelief, misunderstanding or ignorance of God's plans.
6. God's silence must never be interpreted as indicating His willingness to answer our prayers. Even while He is silent, He may be working out the very answer we seek. His silence may indicate His desire that we learn the discipline of patient prayer and humble waiting. God answers our prayers, however perhaps not according to the time schedules we try to impose upon Him. (Cf. Lk. 18:1-8)
7. Nor should we be discouraged from continuing our prayers merely because of a lack of sympathy in the attitude of Jesus' disciples.
8. Not even the difficult or unclear messages from the Lord should deter us from seeking His blessing and remaining His trusting followers. There may be Bible texts and commands that seem to contradict reason or common sense, but they are revelations of what is otherwise unknowable and must be grasped by trusting

God to be telling us the truth.

9. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 136): "So many people . . . pray really because they do not wish to miss a chance. They do not really believe in prayer; they have only the feeling that something might just possibly happen, and they do not wish to miss a chance. This woman came because Jesus was not just a possible helper; He was her only hope."
10. *PHC* (Vol. XXIII, 266): "We too are living under certain definite laws of God; and if we transgress them, then under all ordinary circumstances we must expect the consequences, and we make a grievous mistake in appealing lightly to the mercy of God. Doubtless His mercy is infinite; but so are His truth and justice, and His determination to uphold the laws He has laid down. Our Lord longed to help the woman, but it was hard for Him to infringe the rule which He had laid down for His own guidance."
11. *PHC* (Vol. XXIII, 268) commenting on Mk. 7:28, notices: "This verse contains three important principles for our guidance in the spiritual life. 1. Agree with the Lord, no matter what He says. "Yes, Lord." 2. Think of another truth, and urge it with Him as a plea. "Yet." [i.e. open your eyes to other alternatives or other facets of His will.] 3. Whatever happens, have faith in the Lord, and possess thy soul in patience. His dealings may be unscrutable, but the foundation of them all is love."
12. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 42): "To how many, not only of all nations and conditions, but in all states of heart and mind, nay in the very lowest depths of conscious guilt and alienation from God, must this have brought unspeakable comfort . . . Be it so, an outcast, 'dog,' not at the table, but under the table. Still we are at His feet; it is our Master's Table; He is our Master; and He breaks the children's bread, it is of necessity that 'the children's crumbs,' fall to us—enough, quite enough and to spare. Never can we be outside His reach, nor of that of His gracious care, and of sufficient provision to eternal life."
13. Edersheim (*ibid.*): "Yet this lesson also must we learn, that as 'heathens' we may not call on Him as 'David's Son,' till we know why we so call Him. If there can be no despair, no being cast out by Him, no absolute distance that hopelessly separates from His Person and Provision, there must be no presumption, no forgetfulness of the right relation, no expectancy of magic-miracles, no viewing of Christ as a Jewish Messiah. [i.e. as a

Hebrew superman, a political hero.] We must learn it, and painfully . . . that . . . what we are and where we are, that we may be prepared for the grace of God and the gift of grace. All men—Jews and Gentiles, 'children' and 'dogs' are as before Christ and God equally undeserving and equally sinners, but those who have fallen deep can only learn that they are sinners by learning that they are great sinners and will only taste of the children's bread when they have felt [their need]."

14. Galilee's loss, when Jesus left, is the Gentile woman's gain. (Cfr. Ro. 11:11f) We must take warning from His departure from His own who rejected Him because, although they had almost been moved to yield allegiance to Him, they would not. So He finally abandoned them to their own worst enemy, their own unrealizable personal and national dreams. He can abandon us too, to our own miserable self! (Cf. Ro. 11:17, 24)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. From where had Jesus come when he entered the foreign territory mentioned in this section?
2. Locate geographically the foreign territory where this event occurs.
3. Summarize the travel plan Jesus followed from the debate about traditions until the demand for a sign from heaven. (Mt. 16)
4. What was the stated purpose for this trip? How does this purpose harmonize with the events immediately preceding the trip?
5. List several reasons why Jesus must abide by His original mission to earth by refusing to begin a ministry among the Gentiles.
6. List the various factors that increased the discouragements which the Syrophenician woman must overcome.
7. List the various factors that make the woman's faith "great."
8. Explain Jesus' figure of speech about the dogs under the table.
9. What additional statement does Mark record that might indicate Jesus' willingness to help the woman?
10. How did the woman turn Jesus' figure of speech to her credit, indicating that what she requested was still possible within the express limits of His personal mission?
11. In what condition did the woman find her daughter when she returned home?
12. What evidence is there in this section of Jesus' supernatural identity?

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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophoenician 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 (*kòfinoi*;

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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophoenician 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" (*rhípto*) 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 *bállo* 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 penned 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 treís* ("three days"), which is not the grammatical subject of *prosménousin 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 (*spûridas*) 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 (*kôfinoi*)? If so, then these baskets (*spûridas*) 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 *spûris*: e.g. *spûrisi deipnizein*, "dine" . . . , Arriano Epictetus 4, 10, 21; *apô spûridos dêipna*: "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** (*enêbe eis tò ploion*): 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 Maccabees 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 Maccabees 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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.

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; Psal. 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

affected the religious tenor of the Jews? If not, why not? If so, what religious influence did Herod wield?

- d. Because of their constant exposure to the contradictory and openly antagonistic views of the religious leaders, Jesus' disciples ran the risk of discouragement. Why do you think Jesus was willing to let His own disciples run that risk? Was not Jesus Himself risking the loss of some of His Apostles either to the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, or some other force active in Palestine at that time?
- e. If you feel that there was great risk in the constant exposure to the harassing tactics of the enemies of Jesus, then what measures do you see in Jesus' method that were calculated to strengthen and protect the disciples against the psychological drumming on their minds that these attacks must necessarily cause?
- f. How are we "leavened" in our world? Are there "leavens" in our world about which the Lord would probably warn us today? If so, what are the measures in Jesus' method of dealing with us, His disciples, that strengthen and protect us against the insidious dangers of these influences? If you feel there are no "leavens," then perhaps you have already been leavened!
- g. What are some expressions used in the twentieth century for the same idea meant by Jesus when He warned against the "leaven of" certain leaders and parties? Think of the working and effect of yeast in dough as you answer. Why does Jesus compare doctrine to "leaven"?
- h. Can you explain why the Apostles, having heard Jesus' somber warning, did not discuss the question immediately and directly with Jesus, but rather talked it over among themselves?
- i. Can you see the apparent reasonableness in their (mistaken) conclusion that He was discussing food when He made that serious warning? Show the rationality of their conclusion, from a Jewish, human point of view, even if their conclusion is mistaken. They were reasonable men, even though wrong.
- j. Was it possible for the Apostles, of all people, to have "hardened hearts"? How?
- k. Why do you suppose Jesus brought up the two miraculous feedings, in order to deal with the Apostles' confusion of His meaning?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus turned on His heel and left the Pharisees and Sadducees that had tried to put Him to the test by demanding that He show them a supernatural sign from God. He and His disciples reboarded the boat and sailed for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. When the disciples sailed, they forgot to bring along any bread with them. There was only one loaf in the boat.

Jesus began cautioning the men, "Keep your eyes open: watch out for the 'yeast' of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod!"

Because they had brought no bread, they then began discussing Jesus' enigmatic words among themselves.

Jesus knew about it, so He asked them, "Men, where is your faith? Why all this discussion about the fact that you forgot to bring the bread? Don't you have the slightest idea about what I meant? Are you so slow to grasp it? You have eyes to see with, but can you not see? You have ears to hear with, but can't you hear? Have you already forgotten how many baskets of left-overs you men gathered up when I broke the five barley loaves of bread for the five thousand?"

Someone replied, "Twelve baskets."

"And how many baskets were there when there were but seven loaves to feed four thousand people?"

"Seven, Lord."

"Do you not understand it yet? How could you miss my point then? I was not talking about BREAD at all. I said, 'Be on your guard against the LEAVEN of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod.' "

Then the Apostles realized that He had not been talking about literal yeast for bread at all. Rather, He meant the psychological influence of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod.

SUMMARY

Jesus and the Twelve left the sign-seeking Jewish leaders and sailed northeast across the Galilean Lake. Under way, Jesus warned the Apostles about the leaven of popular leaders and parties. They took His word literally, hence misunderstood Him by thinking He referred to yeast and/or bread contaminated by contact with the proscribed leaders and parties. Since they had only one loaf, which they had already in the boat and had bought none from any of the offending parties, whence any of the danger of contamination supposedly would

come, they could not understand His point. They apparently also thought that the one loaf was insufficient to feed the entire group, because Jesus then rebuked them for their insufficient faith and their short memory that forgot the great miraculous multiplication of food for huge crowds on two occasions, facts that should have permanently removed any further worry about food! Then Jesus explained that His warning concerned the influence, views and opinions of those religious and political parties.

NOTES

A. SITUATION (16:5)

16:5 **And the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread. Came to the other side** (*elthōntes* : . . *eis tò pérān*) need not mean more than "when they went to the other side," since the verb translated "came" means either "to come or go," depending on the point of view of the user. In fact, Mark connects "to the other side" with Jesus' departure.

If they had just sailed from Magadan-Dalmanutha, presumably on the western or south-western shore of Lake Galilee in the general vicinity of Tiberias, then they are sailing toward the eastern shore. Matthew's next geographical notice is in the district of Caesarea Philippi, north and east of the Galilean lake. Mark (8:22-26) records the intervening event of the healing of a blind man at "Bethsaida," which may easily have been the famous Bethsaida Julias located near the northeastern end of the lake and right on Jesus' route north toward Caesarea Philippi. (Cf. Lk. 9:10 and Jn. 6:1)

They had sailed hurriedly, as appears from the detail that they had left without purchasing a sufficient supply of bread. It is probable that the disciples' entire attention had been focused on the clash between Jesus and the clergy, causing them to **forget to take bread**. Mark, however, adds that "they had only one loaf with them in the boat." (Mk. 8:14) Although the chronological connections are not as tight as would be desired to make the conclusion certain, would that one loaf be a remainder from the miraculous feeding of the 4000? (Study Mt. 15:37 = Mk. 8:8; Mt. 15:39 = Mk. 8:10; Mt. 16:4f = Mk. 8:13f) If so, the particularly vigorous scolding Jesus gave the Twelve (Mk. 8:17f) becomes so much more comprehensible. (See on 16:8.) **They forgot to take bread:** was it their normal practice to

furnish themselves with picnic baskets full of provisions for their journeys? If so, at least part of the baskets used to collect the leftovers after the miraculous feedings may have belonged to the Apostles themselves. Further, since the Apostolic group had been only recently travelling through Gentile country (Phoenicia) or through more sparsely settled areas (Decapolis), and since they had deliberately sought privacy for study, it is quite likely that they had grown accustomed to providing their own food supply during this time. So, for these reasons and that given below, we conclude that the disciples literally were so distracted by the debate as to forget to refurnish their dwindled supply at Magadan-Dalmanutha.

Foster (*Middle Period*, 212) sees the consternation among the Apostles caused by Jesus' withdrawal from His enemies as the psychological explanation of this section: "It must have been with a heavy heart that the apostles saw Jesus retreat again from another encounter with His foes." Of course, as we have already seen, Jesus did NOT retreat out of fear or failure, but His disciples, longing for more decisive victories, must have interpreted His hasty departure in this way. Accordingly, Foster then connects Jesus' warning (16:6) with whatever unwholesome thoughts they might have had about it, whether "bitter disappointment over broken dreams, frustration and retreat." He imagines a venomous Pharisean sneer levelled at some Apostle: "I suppose you men will be disappearing again? Why does not your Master stand His ground?" And, because the Apostles had been embarrassed by His apparent indifference to the Pharisees' reactions in the debate over traditions (15:12f), He was now compelled to rebuke their kowtowing to those bigots.

B. JESUS' CRYPTIC WARNING (16:6)

16:1 And Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. This rebuke is intended to counterbalance the negative effects of the recent encounter over signs. **Leaven:** see on 13:33. Matthew explains the figurative meaning of yeast at 16:11, 12 as "teaching." **Take heed and beware of the leaven . . .** What is the main thrust of this warning?

1. Does He mean: "Beware of the corrupting influence the doctrine of these leaders exerts in your own lives and thinking"? In the sections which follow, the disciples amply demonstrate how deeply

affected they were by what would be thought acceptable to others or beneficial to themselves—an attitude which would have certainly guaranteed them some relative calm away from the tempests that would be hurled at them by the unbelieving clergy. But this attitude, arising out of compromise with Jesus' enemies, could only mean the loss of their eternal life, since it meant the end of their discipleship.

2. Or does He mean: "Beware of the deadly influence these leaders will exert in others to turn them against you, i.e. recognize who your real enemies are. Hitherto, as leaders of Israel, they have been religious guides far more dependable than any outside the circle of true religion. Now, however, you must consciously beware the secret and devious ways these politicians operate." Whereas the Twelve finally understood that He referred to "the teaching" of these popular groups and leaders, it would seem that it is not merely their official doctrines that were directly under fire from Jesus here. In fact, if "leaven" connotes every expression of their influence, then He is warning everyone to look beneath the doctrine itself to see the disparity between official pronouncements and real practice, and the hypocrisy of public doctrine in contrast with secret strategies.

Either way, He warns against their general drift and tendency that sways men's thinking.

The leaven of the Pharisees: hypocrisy in all its forms (Lk. 12:1), i.e. traditional religion that emphasizes outward purity regardless of the heart's condition, and substitution of human regulations for God's requirements, often involving outright cancellation of God's. (Cf. Mt. 15:1-20) They were notoriously greedy lovers of money. (Lk. 16:14f) They clung to their confidence in human righteousness as an adequate basis for God's approval.

The leaven of the Sadducees: a rationalism that refused to believe reliable testimony to the supernatural authentication of God's prophets, resulting in a materialistic philosophy in practice. (Cf. Ac. 4:1-6; 23:8) A mockery of all that was holy, all the high priestly family was Sadducean. From a comparison of the parallel text (Mk. 8:15), some have supposed that the "Herodians" were merely Galilean Sadducees, since Matthew repeatedly speaks of "Pharisees and Sadducees," whereas Mark, after "Pharisees," says not "Sadducees," but "Herod." If they are to be identified with each other, then they may have been Sadducees religiously, but Herodians politically,

which, considering the this-worldly concerns of each group, is not at all an unlikely combination. So we may have here a question of dominant emphasis, rather than one of real distinction. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 146) comments:

(Sadducees) were wealthy and aristocratic, and they were deeply involved in politics. So Jesus may well have been saying, "Take care that you never identify the kingdom of heaven with outward goods, and that you never pin your hopes of bringing it in with political action." This may well be a warning against giving material things too high a place in our scheme of values, and against thinking that men can be reformed by political action. Jesus may well have been reminding men that material prosperity is far from being the highest good, and that political action is far from producing the most important results. The true blessings are the blessings of the heart; and the true change is not the change of outward circumstances but the change of the hearts of men.

"The leaven of Herod" (Mk. 8:15), if we should distinguish it from that of the Sadducees, then, may refer to the doctrine of Hellenism with its paganizing tendency to compromise pure Judaism with its faithfulness to Javeh and its necessary separation from paganism. The influence of the Herods was one of conscious innovation, intentionally attempting to make Jews over according to Greek models. Also, the Herodians, as a party, would reflect something of the Roman influence filtered through their puppet-kings, the Herods. Did Jesus also mean to expose the political maneuvering, the jockeying for power, so often characteristic of Herodian family politics? The disciples certainly proved themselves prime targets for this kind of influence, as they fought to decide who among them should consider himself the greatest, who should have the prime seats in the Kingdom, etc. This spirit renders partial judgments and vitiates the persuasiveness of men whose ostensible goal is to make all men holy and godly regardless of their former background or relative position or stature.

However, regardless of their superficial differences, they represent just one deadly influence, because there is one fundamental characteristic common to all: they were all obstinately hostile to the Kingdom of God. Their entire thinking—as this was revealed in their practice—was geared to this world. They were insensitive to truth. Bruce (*Training*, 154) scores their "ungodliness, blindness and deadness of

heart to the divine. They did not know the true and the good when they saw it; and when they knew it, they did not love it." They all demonstrated a common disgust for and distrust of anyone who sincerely dedicated himself to truth and righteousness. One common trait, shared by all these divergent philosophies, has just been illustrated in the previous section. Neither the Pharisees, Sadducees nor Herod could bring themselves to relinquish their pride, position, power and personal opinions long enough to admit the obvious significance of Jesus' Messianic signs. (16:1-4; 14:1 and par.) Their unwillingness to submit to the testimony of the evidence, if ever admitted as a norm by the disciples, would become a creeping, skeptical disease that would wither the spontaneous enthusiasm of true belief. ("Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?" (Jn. 7:48) There is always danger of being shifted into line with false principles and philosophies so subtle and so pervasive that we are unaware of their sway.

C. THE DISCIPLES' MISUNDERSTANDING (16:7)

16:7 **And they reasoned among themselves, saying, We took no bread.** Jesus' words were taken literally: "He must be talking about the leaven of bread." (Cf. 16:12) In this sense, their discussion may have gone something like this: "If bread is pure or unclean on the basis of the yeast's contact with contaminating objects or persons, then He is warning us against buying bread from the parties mentioned, due to its possible ceremonial defilement by them." If this correctly reconstructs their conversation, then **we took no bread** may mean:

1. "At least we are safe from contamination by the leaven of unfriendly leaders and parties, since we brought none of their bread with us."
2. Or, in the light of Jesus' further argument, this is their expression of anguished realization that, because of their preoccupation with His clash with the clergy, they had neglected to make the purchases necessary for their sustenance during their journey. It is almost as if, when Jesus mentioned "yeast" they thought of "bread," because they realized it was too late to provide themselves any.
3. Worse still, they deemed the one loaf they had with them in the boat to be insufficient for their total need. (Cf. Mk. 8:14) And, if there were danger that any bread they should buy in the future

be polluted by contact with the above-mentioned parties, then, by Jesus' warning (as they understood it), they would be forced to do without bread entirely.

Since apparently nothing had been said during the embarkation that would have linked His present warning with the previous clash with the hierarchy, the Twelve, themselves concerned with the mechanics of getting the boat under way, see no immediate connection between **the Pharisees and Sadducees** who asked for a sign and **the Pharisees and Sadducees** whose leaven is to be avoided. Hence, because they were on a different wavelength than Jesus, they did not receive His meaning.

D. JESUS' REBUKE (16:8-11)

1. The indignant accusation of inadequate faith.

16:8 **And Jesus perceiving it, said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have no bread?** Had it been true that Jesus really meant literal bread yeast—as the disciples had supposed—, they still demonstrated a gross lack of genuine trust in the power of One who could turn stones into bread or multiply food endlessly for thousands! **Little faith:** although in verses 9 and 11 He scolds them for their inability to understand, there is no inconsistency involved, since their obtuseness is caused by their lack of faith. They did not understand, simply because they lacked the confidence in Him they should have had.

2. The reproach for limited spiritual insight. (16:9a)

Mark (8:17f) reports Jesus' battery of questions as follows:

Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not yet perceive or understand?

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

And do you not remember?

When I broke the . . . loaves, how many baskets did you take up? . . .

And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets . . . ?

Do you not yet understand?

Their lack of spiritual perception lay in thinking that the one presumably "kosher" loaf remaining in the boat should somehow be thought inadequate to feed them indefinitely, although Jesus was present to multiply it if He so willed. Even if they could not fathom His creative power to turn even stones into bread, they should have at least reasoned: "With Jesus along, all we need is the one loaf we have here in the boat!" Thus, even their confusion about literal yeast should never have blinded them to Jesus' true meaning about the leaven of the Jewish leaders. That Matthew should have ignored the one available loaf, does not argue that he knew nothing about it, because, while Mark's reader might deduce the reasoning pattern suggested above, Matthew's reader, on the other hand, unaided by the notice of even one loaf, is led by its absence to imagine that Jesus could have sustained His men by creating food out of nothing! Either way, therefore, the readers are inexorably led to see Jesus' power as Creator.

Bruce (*Training*, 156) blames the disciples' confusion on their treating . . .

. . . the incident on the other side of the lake too lightly, and . . . their neglect to provide bread too gravely. They should have taken more to heart the ominous demand for a sign, and the solemn words spoken by their Master in reference thereto; and they should not have been troubled about the want of loaves in the company of Him . . . Their thoughtlessness in one direction, and their over-thoughtfulness in another, showed that food and raiment occupied a larger place in their minds than the kingdom of God and its interests.

Another motive for their hardness of heart (Mk. 8:17), or closed-mindedness, is the fact that their mind was still bemoaning His refusal of the Messianic crown and His steadfast refusal to baffle and wipe out His opposition by some majestic display of supernatural fire-power. With this kind of mentality in the disciples, it is understandable that they would not arrive at spiritual solutions that reflect a believer's heart and comprehension.

3. The reminder of two stupendous miracles in the very area of their doubts. (16:9b, 10)

This reminder is significant for the following reasons:

1. Both miracles had taken place in Herod's territory (see on 14:13b)

and on 15:29). So, the disciples' concern not to buy Herod's leaven would be ill-founded, since Jesus could have sustained them indefinitely at any place in Herod's realm without recourse to bread made impure by that king, had that been Jesus' real intent when speaking about Herod's leaven. And by reflection, the same could also be true of the leaven of the other parties.

2. This reminder serves also to distinguish the two great miracles for all future ages that might tend to confuse the two and doubt both. (See "The Critical Importance of This Account" before 15:29 where some differences between the two miraculous feedings are noted.) Beyond the obvious differences in numbers of people, bread, fish and baskets, the kind of baskets is different. The 12 baskets (*kòfinos*, v. 9) would have been of any size, but were considered typical of the Jews, i.e. suitable for carrying kosher food. The 7 baskets (*spùris*, v. 10) were large hampers for edibles and other purposes.
3. **How many baskets did you take up?** By pushing them to provide these numbers, He is impressing upon them the liberality of His supernatural ability when the occasion for its display requires. It really mattered not *how many*, because ANY left-over fragments is proof enough of His power. What mattered now was that "you *took up* so many baskets, and yet you now worry that you have no bread?!"

4. Jesus repeats His statement about leaven. (16:11)

Lest the result of these statements of Jesus come as a surprise to the unwary reader, to whom v. 12 seems not to follow from v. 11, let it be noticed that Jesus does not merely repeat His former statement about leaven. (v. 6) Rather, the two sentences in v. 11, taken together, form an antithesis: "NOT BREAD, BUT LEAVEN!", an antithesis confirmed by the disciples' conclusion. (v. 12) So, if *leaven*, according to Jesus, stands in contrast to *bread* which is usually made with leaven, then *leaven* must be understood in its figurative sense, rather than literally, as the Twelve had done earlier.

Jesus repeated His metaphor, because "leaven" conveys His meaning a bit better than does the literal word "teaching," since it carries the nuance of a corrupting spirit and example so subtle that the damage would be done before it could be recognized for what it was. Bruce (*Training*, 155) defines it:

The spirit of unbelief which ruled in Jewish society Jesus described as leaven, with special reference to its diffusiveness; and most fitly, for it passes from sire to son, from rich to poor, from learned to unlearned, till a whole generation has been vitiated by its malign influence. Such was the state of things in Israel as it came under His eye. Spiritual blindness and deadness, with the outward symptom of an inward malady,—a constant craving for evidence,—met Him on every side. The common people, the leaders of society, the religious, the skeptics, the courtiers, and the rustics, were all blind and yet apparently all most anxious to see, ever renewing the demand, ‘What sign showest Thou, that we may see and believe Thee? What doest Thou work?’

E. THE DISCIPLES FINALLY UNDERSTAND (16:12)

Now they are doubly sure they needed His warning to realize that they are in a world which could so easily influence them as to leave them useless to Jesus.

1. In fact, they had been so blinded by their own thinking which had arisen out of their associations with Pharisean thought and practice, that this kept them from grasping instantly the simplest metaphor Jesus lay before them! Their hypothetical conversation reconstructed at v. 7, assumes this Pharisean mentality and ambient at every turn. Ironically, from this standpoint, then, they actually proved their deep need for His warning, even as they discussed its meaning! The leaven of the Pharisees was even then at work in their midst, because they argued like Pharisees!
2. He had patiently led them to the correct understanding not only of His warning, but also of their own blundering logic about bread. Sadducean unbelief in the supernatural had reared its ugly head in their little faith to trust Him to multiply food miraculously if necessary.

Since this verse indicates that the Twelve should have understood **“the teaching”** from the first, and not **the leaven of bread**, is McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 408) correct in thinking that “Jesus had resorted to metaphor because the word leaven better expressed his idea than did the word teaching”? Should we conclude that the disciples still missed something of His meaning, since they concluded

that He meant **the teaching**, and not the influence? No, because, as all great teachers know, the power of influence, spirit and example is as truly **teaching**, or doctrine, as all the dogmatic formulas pronounced in official, formal instruction. Although such is not "taught," it is "caught," just as truly and surely as if it had been taught.

APPLICATIONS

THE SUBTLE INFLUENCE OF EVIL

1. We too can be influenced by men of influence in our society who have such a subtle sway over our thinking that we may be unconscious of it at all.
 - a. Perhaps they never sit in the official seats of learning to diffuse their doctrines, but their corrupting power is nevertheless real. Life cannot be lived aright, if the beliefs which lie at the base of its moral character are mistaken, misleading or false. But these beliefs are none the less doctrines, regardless of their origin or method of propagation.
 - b. Again, there are other reputable gentlemen who are too clever to commit themselves publicly on the side of immorality or in favor of ideas tending toward apostacy from the living God. Yet, the spirit and essence revealed in their way of expressing themselves, and the imperceptible spell of their personal example, seduces the unaware into infidelity.
 - c. The persuasiveness of the peril is greater than it seems, because there is usually just a grain of truth in every mistaken concept which seems to depend upon it, just enough truth to make the whole mistake palatable.
 - d. The pressure to embrace the false or wrong-headed thinking is further enhanced by the prestige and apparent rectitude of those who hold such opinions.
2. Like the Apostles, we too can place such an emphasis upon the physical cares and concerns of this life, that the most solemn words of our Master upon problems of vastly greater importance fade into insignificance, be misunderstood and wrongly applied.
3. Now, as then, it will always be tempting to follow the modern religio-political scholarship and modes and moods popularized by men of note:
 - a. By supposing that the right rites, the correct phrases, and the

proper traditions can please God and bless mankind.

- b. By identifying the Kingdom of God with material wealth or by promoting its advancement by political activism, hoping to reform men by substituting social change for personal conversion.
 - c. By not caring about the paganizing propaganda that bombards us daily, threatening our separation from the world for God's use.
4. What is our salvation and protection from the ascendancy of these insidious inducements?
- a. We must never forget that it is JESUS who admonishes us against these infernal masteries. It is His word that defines the danger.
 - (1) Therefore, let His sure word penetrate every part of our being, so that His will might be the only power active in our lives. His truth in us can empower us to take the offensive against the malignant sway of evil. Look what His Word did to the early Christians as they launched their counterattack against all the leavens in their day!
 - (2) Let us choose our most intimate friends with great care, since even our own loved ones exercise an influence upon us that is not always edifying. (1 Co. 15:33; cfr. Mt. 16:22f!) Choose friends that love Jesus; let His Word be the norm by which our close companions are chosen.
 - b. It is the patience of Jesus Himself that can save us! Morgan (*Matthew*, 207) says it so well:

He Who turned His back in satirical scorn upon the Pharisees and Sadducees who had come for no other purpose than to tempt Him was very patient with the blundering disciples and waited for them. Oh He is a wonderful Master! He will say it again if we do not understand it the first time. If you are a Pharisee or a Sadducee with your animosity, and your criticism and your cleverness, He will laugh at you in high heaven, and He will turn His back upon you. But if you are a weak, trembling, foolish, frail child, thinking about loaves when you ought to be thinking about spiritual things, He will say it again . . .

- c. But we too must watch, standing guard against every influence in our life that could compromise our position in Christ and our usefulness in His hands!
5. WE CAN BE LEAVENED:

- a. By the attitudes of the church in which we grew up without ever realizing that its attitudes were not always necessary expressions of true Christianity. This is not to undermine the ancient merely because of its antiquity, but to challenge us to examine the positions and attitudes of fallible human beings, because they are human.
- b. By the atmosphere of the world which we absorb like the air we breath. The moral pollution is as real as the material sort, and often we are just as unconscious of the effect of the one on our spirit as we are unaware of the damage to our body of the other.
- c. By OURSELVES! Blessed is the man who is so alert that he cannot be fooled by the falsehoods he is tempted to believe true about himself! Blessed is the man who can not be deceived by his own self-righteousness!
- d. By men who walk with God: look at Moses and Abraham, David and Isaiah, Daniel and John the Baptist, Peter and Paul. They knew more about heaven than most, because they knew God. (Cf. 1 Co. 11:1; Phil. 4:9!)
- e. By the God who is the final, real satisfaction of the soul. When God who created a world full of so many satisfactions, calls us to what He says is far better, we must be willing to sacrifice all of earth's satisfactions for one day with Him. We must never compare the paltry interests of earth with the glories of a heaven we have never seen or have only heard about.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is "leaven"? Explain its literal and figurative uses. How is it used in our text?
2. State all the similarities and differences between the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000. Show how these two separate miracles become important in the context of this discussion about the Apostles' misunderstanding of certain words of Jesus.
3. Regarding the provision of bread for the traveling group of Jesus, what was their usual method of operation? How did they generally procure food on their evangelistic tours? Did this trip differ from their usual practice? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. How many loaves of bread were in the boat? Who tells us this? Of what importance is this fact?
5. When did the disciples discover that they had forgotten to buy

bread for the trip?

6. Define the "leaven of the Pharisees." Why was this dangerous to the Apostles?
7. Define the "leaven of the Sadducees." Why was this dangerous to the Apostles?
8. Define the "leaven of Herod." Why was this dangerous to the Apostles?
9. Explain why Jesus gave this warning at this particular time. What events led up to and called for this warning? What actions and attitudes in the Apostles' lives shortly *after* this proved the timeliness of this warning?
10. List three other retreats before this one, where Jesus deliberately left a public ministry to take His Apostles away for awhile.
11. From what and to what was Jesus withdrawing each time?
12. In what sense does Jesus intend the expression: "Are your hearts hardened?" Is this the same sort of hard heart found in a determined sinner? If so, explain how the Apostles themselves could be in danger of this condition. If not, explain how Jesus' words are to be otherwise interpreted.
13. Why did Jesus make reference to the two miraculous multiplications of food for the multitudes? What connection is there with Jesus' warning about leaven?

Section 41

NEAR CAESAREA PHILIPPI JESUS TESTS HIS DISCIPLES

(Parallels: Mark 8:27—9:1; Luke 9:18-27)

TEXT: 16:13-28

13 Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is? 14 And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter and upon

this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ.

21 From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. 22 And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. 24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. 28 Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus examined the convictions of His disciples at this time? In this way? In this particular place?
- b. Can you suggest what might have been the reason Jesus was praying before He tested His men? What would have been the subject of His prayer, the concern that drove Him to His knees before the event that follows? (Lk. 9:18)
- c. What was there about the ministry of Jesus, or His personality or message, that caused people to remember John the Baptist? Elijah? Jeremiah, or one of the other ancient prophets? Why were there so many opinions held about Jesus? Could they not admit that He was the Messiah and be done with it?
- d. Why do you think it should have been Peter to answer Jesus' question? Did not the other apostles believe this too?
- e. Why should Jesus be so thrilled with Peter's conclusion that He was

God's Son and Messiah? Had not these same Apostles made similar statements before this?

- f. What does it mean to confess Jesus as the Christ and Son of God in the twentieth century?
- g. Is not God being partial to Peter, since He revealed this majestic truth to him? Had God revealed it to anyone else before this? If so, to whom? How?
- h. Almost all commentaries notice the play on words in Greek where Jesus said, "You are Peter (*Pétros*) and on this rock (*pétra*) I will build my church . . ." (Mt. 16:18) Centuries of church history have witnessed the bitter debates that have raged around those two words and their meaning. The Catholic interpreters have argued that this linguistic play on words proves that Jesus intended to constitute Peter as first pope and hierarchical head of the Church. Protestants, generally, see the differences in grammatical gender a real difference in meaning between *Pétros* (masculine) and *pétra* (feminine). Do you not agree that Jesus should have been more careful in His use of words at such a critical moment in His teaching about the true foundation of the Church? Could He not have foreseen the difficulties such a play on words would cause? Now, if you think that He was careful and that there is no difficulty here, would you explain Jesus' play on words? To do this, you will need (1) to clarify why Jesus says "You are Peter." Did not Peter already know his symbolic name? (Cf. Jn. 1:42) Then, why bring his name up now, if Jesus did not intend to make some allusion to it? Then, (2) you will need to show how the word "rock" (*pétra*) is or is not related to Simon's name "Peter" (*Pétros*).
- i. Since Jesus used the word "church" to describe what it is that He intends to construct, what do we learn about His plans? What did He mean by that word? How does it differ from His other expression: "the kingdom of God"?
- j. What was so vital about Jesus' assurances that even death itself ("Hades") could not hinder His Church? Why mention it to these disciples at precisely this time?
- k. How can Jesus practically hand over the keys to God's kingdom to human beings like Peter and expect that what they permit or require of others will be precisely what God wants?
- l. Why should so marvelous a truth as that confessed by Peter be hushed up by Jesus right on the heels of its pronouncement? Why would it have been politically most inexpedient to publish Jesus' Messiahship during this portion of His earthly ministry?

- m. What does the precision with which Jesus predicts His demise and resurrection tell you about Him?
- n. What was so wrong with Peter's rebuking Jesus? What do you think prompted him to do it?
- o. How do you think Jesus must have felt to have His solicitous friend express his concern in this way? What was so viciously diabolical about the fact that Peter *lovingly* rebuked the Lord?
- p. Why was it so important that the Master expose Peter's anxious consideration to such scathing criticism? Where had he gone wrong?
- q. Why do you think it was so important that Jesus demand the death to self of all who would follow Him? First, why was it important to demand it of those followers during that particular historical moment? Second, what connection is there between self-renunciation and repentance and salvation, if any?
- r. Is not Jesus using double-talk when He promises that those who "lose" their life for His sake will actually find it, while those who would "save" their life will "lose" it? Or is there some deeper paradox involved here? Explain.
- s. Is not Jesus being a bit impractical to suppose that the average man on the street is even vaguely concerned with "gaining the whole world"? Who among the common people is even bothered with this problem? Or is this really what Jesus was thinking? What is this "whole world" He had in mind?
- t. How can a person "forfeit his life" in gaining the whole world?
- u. List some of the things that people are already giving in exchange for their life.
- v. What part of man is referred to by the expression "life," or "soul"? In other words, what is really at stake in losing or gaining it? Use other language to describe just what it is in each of us that is threatened by bad choices or saved by the right decision in the area mentioned by Jesus.
- w. Why would anyone want to be ashamed of Jesus or His message?
- x. Is not Jesus just being vindictive to threaten anyone who is ashamed of Him with repayment for what he has done?
- y. Matthew reports that Jesus' disciples would live to see "the Son of man coming in His kingdom," while Mark says they will see "the kingdom of God come with power," but Luke only mentions "the kingdom of God." Which of these three is right—that is, what did Jesus actually say? Could He have said and meant all this? If so, what did He mean? How do the three different phrases

relate to each other?

- z. What do you think Jesus intended to accomplish by promising that some of His disciples would live to see the Messianic Kingdom arrive in power? How would this statement tend to take some of the sting out of previous demands for "blood, sweat and tears"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Leaving Bethsaida Julias in the company of His disciples, Jesus continued His journey on north toward the villages in the district of Caesarea Philippi. On the way there, while Jesus was away from the crowds, praying by Himself with only His disciples around Him, He quizzed them: "Who are people saying that I, the Son of man, am?"

"Some say you are John the Baptist," they began. "Others think you are Elijah. We have also heard some say that you are Jeremiah or one of the ancient prophets come back to life."

"But what about *you*?" He persisted, "Who do *you* think I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Then Jesus continued, "What a fortunate man you are, Simon, John's son! You did not get that information from any purely human source. Rather, it was my heavenly Father who revealed this truth to you. Now, I too have something to say about you: you are what your name 'Peter' implies—a rock. Further, your name symbolically suggests the kind of rock upon which I will found my congregation of the new Israel, the Church, and death itself will be powerless against the Church. Further, Peter, I will give you the right to open God's Kingdom to men: what you forbid men to do will be what God wants forbidden. Whatever you permit people to do will be what He wants permitted."

But then Jesus gave the disciples strict orders not to reveal to anyone that He was the Messiah. Further, it was from this very period that Jesus began to impress upon His followers the divine inevitability of His going to Jerusalem where He would go through a great deal of suffering and be repudiated by the Jewish supreme court, the hierarchy and the theologians, and finally be murdered. "However," He continued, "three days later I will arise from the dead!" He made this statement quite bluntly without any reserve.

At this, Peter took Jesus to one side and began to take Him to task, "May God in His mercy spare you this fate, Lord! Nothing like this

must ever happen to you!"

But when Jesus turned, He saw His disciples. So He reprimanded Peter in their presence: "Get moving, Satan-like adversary! Behind me! Presuming to direct me, you have become but the trigger of a trap! Once a precious rock, you are now a stone to cause me to stumble! Once instructed by God, you now follow human thinking. You may have expressed a popular viewpoint, but you have totally missed God's!"

Meanwhile a crowd was gathering, so Jesus summoned these people to join His disciples to hear Him say: "Anyone who plans to be MY student must give up all right to himself, disown himself, leave his own ambitions behind, yes, say of himself, 'I never knew him,!' Day after day he must shoulder his cross, yes, say of himself, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' He must come with ME, wherever I wish to lead him. The prudent are damned: whoever cares more for his own safety than for my service is lost! But anyone who will let himself run the risk of losing everything he ever thought dear, giving up his right to it for MY sake and for the Gospel, that man is the only one who is really safe and can really protect his life and save his soul!

"In fact, in the balances of eternity, what advantage is there for someone to conquer everything he aims for, only to find that it cost him his SOUL?! Or what could a man give that would buy his soul back, once it is irretrievably lost?

If anyone feels ashamed of me or my message during these days of faithlessness and sin, I, the Son of man, will be ashamed of him when I return! In fact, I will come in my GLORY, in the GLORY of my Father with the GLORIOUS, holy angels. Then I will give each man what is coming to him on the basis of what he decided and did.

"However, I can assure you that some of you very people standing here today will live to see it. You will see me coming in my Kingdom, yes, God's Kingdom! And when it comes, it will come with POWER!"

SUMMARY

Jesus tested the Apostles concerning their personal grasp of His mission and message. Peter, responding for the Twelve, showed deep understanding by confessing Him to be God's Son and Messiah. Overjoyed, Jesus made truth incarnate in human personality the basis of His new community and Peter a principle spokesman in it. When Jesus then made the bold declaration of His coming suffering and

resurrection, Peter, horrified, rebuked Him. After reprimanding His friend, the Lord pointed out that all true followers must expect to undergo whatever is the lot of their Master. Although there is suffering and shame ahead, there is also victory in the end and hope for the near future: Jesus' reign will soon have its powerful, glorious beginning.

NOTES

A. THE GOOD CONFESSION (16:13-20)

1. The disciples questioned about public opinion. (16:13)

16:13 Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi . . . Should we attach any special significance to His choice of sites for this critical conversation? Concerning *Caesarea* (= Paneas) Plummer (*Matthew*, 224) observes the following coincidences:

The name Paneas came from the grotto of Pan, which represented the elemental worship of the old inhabitants, close to which Herod the Great had built a temple in honour of the Emperor (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XV, 10, 3; *Wars*, I, 21, 3); and this represented the most modern of heathen cults. Thus, just where Judaism touched both the worship of nature and the worship of man, Jesus called upon His disciples to answer for mankind and for themselves as to what His claims upon the conscience were as against the claims of these conflicting worships.

These coincidences are interesting, but not essential, since Mark (8:27) locates the following conversation as taking place "on the way to the villages of Caesarea Philippi (*eis tà kòmas K.t.Ph. kai en tê hodô*), and Matthew loosely places the event somewhere *in the district of Caesarea Philippi (elthôn . . . eis tà mére K.t.Ph.)*. This observation weakens the surmise that they were necessarily standing in sight of the city of Caesarea, supposed figurative basis for Jesus' remarks at 16:18, 19.

The timing of this event is more significant than the place. The Twelve had now completed nearly two and a half years of daily, close personal association with Jesus, learning from Him. By this time they must have formed a mature opinion of His true identity. This

test came approximately six months before the cross.

This calculation is based on the following data: this conversation occurred at least one week before the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1; Lk. 9:28). A trip to Capernaum took place thereafter. (Mt. 17:24) There were discussions and a sermon at Capernaum. (Mt. 18) Then Jesus' brothers say, "Why not go to feast of Tabernacles?" (Jn. 7:2, 3) Later, Jesus attended that feast (Jn. 7:14) in the fall, six months before the last Passover on which He died.

This exam was prepared in the prayers of Jesus. Luke (9:18) reminds us that "He was praying," and out of these supplications came these critical questions. How His heart must have ached as He considered the consequences of this test, earnestly pleading that they be given the grace to decide rightly. At that moment the Lord prayed alone, only His Twelve being around Him. Although a crowd began forming later (Mk. 8:34), some arrangement for privacy may have been made, similar to that in Gethsemane. (cf. Mt. 26:36-39, 42, 44) Not only would He pray for their good confession despite His rejection by the majority in Israel, but also that they would accept His revelations concerning His humiliation at Jerusalem.

What motivated Jesus to question His disciples in this way? The possible motives are many:

1. He must deal with the undeniable pressure brought upon His disciples by the opposition. The antagonism is growing among leaders who everywhere attempted to undermine His teaching and authority. Part of the low opinions voiced about Jesus, and reported by the Twelve (vv. 13, 14), may well be the tangible results of hostile undercurrents that viciously undercut His claims. Such unbelief must be met solidly, lest its intimidation begin to tell upon His precious nucleus of followers (cf. 16:12) The site chosen for this examination is remarkable only for its distance from the center of orthodox Judaism: Judea and Jerusalem. This factor is more understandable when we notice its position in Jesus' travels abroad, or else on the periphery of the Holy Land. (See notes on 15:21.) He has been deliberately avoiding frontal conflicts with the hierarchy since His collision with the Pharisees over traditions. (Mt. 15:1ff) The refusal to cater to the sign-seeking critics abruptly concluded that interview too. (16:1-4) So, whereas the choice of this particular district for the examination may not be particularly significant (i.e. Caesarea Philippi, as opposed to Damascus or

Pella or some other semi-Gentile center), its distance from the pressure-points of His opposition is. Further, He had been giving His disciples every opportunity to grow in information and experience, so that they would be able to withstand the tension of opposition, because they could not long remain unaffected by the majority rejection of their Master.

2. These men who will become the divine missionaries to carry Jesus' Kingdom to the ends of the world must now face their semi-final exams. If the unexamined life is not worth living, the untested faith is doubly so, because it is in graver danger of presuming to be above trial. Precisely because the disciples cannot envision the approaching cross, the Lord must reveal His approaching death, and He understands how difficult this will be for them to accept. Therefore, He must first sound their commitment to Him by testing how far they are willing to identify Him as God's Ambassador and Revealer, God's Messiah and Son.

How did He proceed? **He asked his disciples saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is?** For maximum contrast between their own personal commitment to Him and the popular evaluations, He first focuses their thinking on what others were saying, before laying the vital question on the table. Tolbert (*Good News From Matthew*, 141f) rightly analyzes the first question:

The question about the opinion of others is, however, a basic question of tremendous importance to one's own faith. The disciples did not live in a vacuum. They lived in a society where people held many conflicting opinions about Jesus. They needed to be aware of the options. They needed to recognize that they had to live out their own faith among people who did not agree with them.

Although He deliberately helps them to bring their own thinking into sharp focus by first eliminating all lesser theories about His identity, this does not mean, however, that many disciples, previous to this, had not already begun to form some very solid conclusions about Him. (Cf. Jn. 1:49; 3:2; 4:42; Lk. 5:8; Jn. 6:14, 68, 69)

The Son of man (see on 8:20) Although He had used this title in connection with divine prerogatives (see on 9:6), its relative indefiniteness as a Messianic title makes it appear here that He intends to keep His humanity before the disciples. In fact, had **Son of man** been completely unambiguous, He would have been loading His

questions in favor of His Messiahship, and thus predetermining the disciples' answer. There would be no point in asking, "Who do men say that the Christ (= "Son of man") is?," if He expected Peter's actual answer. Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 43) notices this:

. . . The expression "Son of man," often a synonym for Messiah, is often reduced in value to a simple pronoun. [i.e. "I," HEF.] That this is the case in the present text is evident from the fact that Jesus could not have asked what the crowds thought of the Messiah, because, in that case, the answer would have been different. He asked, rather, what they thought of Him. (Cf. also Mk. 8:31 and Lk. 9:21 with Mt. 16:21.)

2. Public Opinion (16:14)

16:14 And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. And these are just the good opinions! There had been other choice expressions: "Beelzebul!" (Mt. 10:25); "Blasphemer!" (Mt. 9:3) "Glutton and drunkard, a friend of sinners!" (11:19) Jesus' townspeople at Nazareth had marked Him down as nothing more than "the carpenter's son," but were left without a satisfactory explanation of His wisdom and mighty works. (Mt. 13:54ff) The speculations now reviewed by the Twelve quite vividly represented the confusion rampant in Galilee in that period. (Cf. Mt. 14:1f = Mk. 6:14ff = Lk. 9:7ff) As usual, public opinion is divided:

1. **John the Baptist:** the fear of Herod. (Mt. 14:1-11, see notes.) Anyone who really knew the life-style of the two men would never have confused the ascetic John and the perfectly normal Jesus. (Mt. 11:18f, see notes.) However, it is right to remember the similarity in the fundamental doctrines taught by both, at least at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. (Cf. Mt. 3:2; 4:17)
2. **Elijah** (Cf. Mal. 4:5; Jn. 1:21) This view, although based upon prophecy, was an ignorant conclusion, because John the Baptist had personally fulfilled all that Malachi had intended. (Cf. Mt. 11:14) Later, even the inner Three needed repeated instruction to clarify the issue. (Mt. 17:10-13)
3. **Jeremiah** (Cf. 2 Macc. 2:1-8; 15:13, 14; 2 Esdr. 2:17f) Whereas these books are not Scripture, yet they report traditions known to the Jews of Jesus' day, who, in turn, would be encouraged by

such statements to think of Jesus as "the Jeremiah." Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 44) expands this:

Although the Jewish legend sees him as having hid the sacred fire, the altar and the Tent of meeting in a cave before the sack of Jerusalem, Jeremiah never assumed an important position in Jewish apocalyptic. (2 Macc. 2:1-8) It was logical, however, for the common people to think that Jeremiah—who had already appeared in a vision to Onias to give him a gold sword (2 Macc. 15:3-16)—should reappear before the Messiah, to reveal the cave and return to the Hebrews the objects necessary for worship.

McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 143) sees Jesus' characteristic denunciation of the sins of the age, combined with the genuine sorrow He felt for His people, as suggestive to some that He were Jeremiah.

4. **One of the old prophets** "has arisen." (Lk. 9:19; cf. the exact words of Herod's courtiers, Lk. 9:15) This indefinite suggestion shows a perplexity about Jesus that may reflect the hopes of 1 Macc. 14:41: ". . . until a faithful (genuine?) prophet should arise (from death?) *héos toû anastênai profêten pistòn*." Or, is it only Luke's intention to clarify for his Gentile readers, to whom resurrection would be a new concept, how it could be thought that an ancient prophet long dead could return to earth? Its very indefiniteness makes this last alternative sound like the usual 14% of the population that is always undecided!

The confusion evident in current speculation about Jesus' true identity has a dual basis:

1. The time and opportunities to know Jesus better differed from person to person according to the amount and kind of exposure to Him they had enjoyed. Jesus' travels throughout Palestine evidently permitted only some teaching and some miracles in any given place. Although what He gave them should have sufficed, nevertheless, people, whose tenaciously held preconceived notions do not permit them to admit the evidential force of His words and works, require more time and situations to permit Jesus' loving self-giving to infiltrate their barriers of prejudice and convince them. This, of course, does not excuse their lack of hunger and thirst for righteousness and truth that would have spurred them to get to the bottom of the problem.
2. Jesus' multifaceted ministry presented varying aspects of His

true identity. Thus, in Jesus the true prophet, men could discern uncommon greatness that convincingly reminded them of the GIANTS of Old Testament history. But, even so, to refuse these evidences of His supernatural identity and His messianic claims as incredible, however well established they might be, is to say: "We do not believe."

While there was something in Jesus that reminded them of something mighty in each of the prophets mentioned, yet there was something in the people themselves that blocked their comprehension from going any further! The opinions listed are high, noble and respectful. Yet, however complimentary any of these theories may have been intended to be, to say anything less about Jesus than confess His rightful position as God's Son, the Messiah of Israel and Lord of the universe, is to "damn Him with faint praise!" Everyone must decide about Him whereinsofar the evidence permits, but to continue demanding proof in the face of conclusive evidence, or to refuse to admit that His credentials substantiate His claims, is to defame Him, and deny His claims to deity. (See "The Deity of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount," Vol. I, 185; Jn. 5:17f; Mt. 9:3-6)

So, when Jesus lay this first question before them, He was pushing them to face the following hard realities:

1. That an abyss separates them from the contrary and conflicting views of their own countrymen. To continue this way will mean the loss of their friendship, support and popularity.
2. That the judgment others pronounce upon Jesus must have no effect upon their decision. Their choice may be painfully and rigidly personal. Public opinion, itself divided, cannot be trusted to give a united, unequivocal answer on this vital issue. Therefore, the well-known differences of interpretation among the scholars do not dispense anyone from making his own personal research to find for himself the truth about Jesus. After all, everyone must finally answer the question: "But who do you say that I am?" The divergent interpretations exonerate no one from committing himself personally.
3. That the most favorable estimations, whereby many ascribed to Jesus prophetic authority, actually rejected Him. It is absolutely unpardonable that anyone should honor Jesus as a prophet, while rejecting the declarations He made regarding Himself. In fact, they did not embrace His claims as the words of a true prophet. Otherwise, they would have admitted the Messianic claims He

made. These statements were treated with the same indifference one would show to those of a common imposter or of someone unbalanced. Thus, the "esteem" for Jesus, that does not lead to submission to His word as the prophetic voice of God, must be considered a rejection.

3. Jesus pushes the Apostles to confess their personal position.
(16:15)

16:15 And he saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? Having given them opportunity to consider the alternatives and form a mature judgment, He now directs the critical question to His men. Even without one direct suggestion on this occasion, He is giving His students all the help to do well that He can. Whereas they had undoubtedly compared notes among themselves before this moment, still they had not been pressed to commit themselves so deeply as now. Whereas all earlier confessions were prompted by the spontaneous reaction of some disciple to some evidence of Jesus' greatness, the solemn moment has now arrived for them to answer a question Jesus had never asked before, but toward which all His activities had been directed.

These are men who had enjoyed superior opportunities to know about Jesus, having been His close associates for more than two years now. They had eaten and slept and ministered with Him. Because of their personal attachment to Him as itinerate Teacher, they had sacrificed family, comforts of home and business to be His under-studies. What they conclude from these associations with Him is of more than academic importance and interest to the reader. In fact, the earlier half-hidden hints and proofs of Jesus' Messiahship and supernatural character have all been leading up to this chapter. What have these closest observers of the Jesus-phenomenon to say about Him?

Note that Jesus cannot make the best use of people who have no clear idea about His identity. Only those who have defined for themselves their personal experience of Him in a clear, intelligent conviction can proclaim it with boldness and enthusiasm.

4. The Apostles' Answer Given By Peter (16:16)

16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Critics spend pages arguing which form of the "good confession" is the original wording, and which has been worked over according to the editorial theology of the "author": Matthew's, which is the fullest expression; or Mark's, which is the briefest; or Luke's? The most obvious explanation is that Matthew's account is the most complete, while that of Mark and Luke represent the abbreviated versions. Carver (*Self-interpretation of Jesus*, 107) wryly comments:

Sometimes the obvious explanation is the most intelligent. There is no more vicious principle in Biblical criticism than that, among various accounts of an incident or reports of a speech, the briefest is most likely to be accurate (i.e. perfectly verbatim, HEF). The briefest is always condensed, as indeed the fullest must be.

Others had confessed Jesus before this moment:

1. John the Baptist (Jn. 1:34) and Nathaniel (Jn. 1:49) called Him "Son of God."
2. Andrew, Peter's brother (Jn. 1:40f) exclaimed: "We have found the Messiah!"
3. Samaritans recognized Him as "Christ" and "Savior of the world." (Jn. 4:25, 28f, 41f)
4. All who had called Him "Son of David" thereby admitted His Messiahship. (Mt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22)
5. Even the Apostles themselves had confessed Jesus before this hour. After Jesus walked on the water and calmed the storm (Mt. 14:33): "Truly, you are God's Son!"
6. After multitudes deserted Jesus to follow Him no more, Peter affirmed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God." (Jn. 6:68f)

But this confession is far more critical than those preceding it, since it indicates to what extent the Twelve, at this point in their experience, have committed themselves to the foundation-belief of the Kingdom, that message they must proclaim throughout their ministry as His emissaries. Always and everywhere it must be "Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, God's Son and foundation of our faith." McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 411) notes another distinction between

this confession and other, earlier statements which . . .

. . . had been under the pressure of miraculous display and strong emotion. Hence they were rather exclamatory guesses at the truth, and differed from this now made by Peter which was the calm expression of a settled conviction produced by the character and miracles of Jesus.

The Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter affirms two distinct truths about Jesus, a fact indicated by the repeated use of the article. **Son of God** does not stand in apposition to **Christ**, as if explaining something about **Christ**. *Christ* refers to His office as the one whom God anointed (Greek = *christôs* = "anointed"), whereas **Son of God** refers to His divine nature. (Cf. Jn. 1:1, 14, 18; 5:17f; 10:36; Lk. 22:67-71) **Christ** declares the belief that He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to the messianic office (Cf. Ac. 10:37, 38), and underlines His humanness, since the Christ must be the human son of David. (See on 1:1-17; Lk. 1:31f) **Son of God** affirms Jesus' spatio-temporal generation by the Father in the womb of the Virgin. (Lk. 1:32, 35; Gal. 4:4) Even if Peter imperfectly comprehended the full significance of his own words, it is unfair to him for some to affirm that he could have understood absolutely nothing of the high concepts he was later inspired to reveal in his apostolic ministry. Nothing positive may be affirmed about how much Jesus had revealed about Himself to this inner group of disciples beyond the well-substantiated self-revelations made before this encounter. (See on 16:17.) That is, did He reveal to them the circumstances surrounding the Virgin Birth that we have learned from Mt. 1 and Lk. 1? Even if these revelations had not been given, Peter could have based his affirmation of Jesus' divine Sonship on the following evidences: Jn. 5:17f, 25; 10:36; Mt. 3:17 and par. Jn. 1:29-34; Mt. 8:29 and par. Account must also be taken of the disciples' own Jewish culture which would have predisposed them to entertain the notion that the Messiah might also be the Son of God.

1. There are the Messianic texts of Scripture that picture the great Servant of Javeh as the "eternal Father, mighty God," "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days," etc. (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2) Would devout hearers of the law and prophets, read to them every Sabbath, fail to attempt the harmonization of God's great promises to come personally to bless and heal His remnant, with those promises to send His Servant, the Son of man? (cf. Mal. 3:1f;

Zech. 9:9-16; Dan. 7:13f, etc.)

2. Despite the live possibility that some portions of the book of Enoch were actually post-Christian interpolations, if even some of the texts that speak of a supernatural Messiah be of pre-Christian authorship, hence undoubtedly Jewish thinking, then those few do demonstrate the conclusion that the divine Sonship of the Messiah formed a real part of the contemporary Messianic belief among the Jews.

The problem with citations from Enoch is the problematic dating of its "Son of God" sections. Is 2 Esdras 2:47 of Christian origin? In 2 Esdras 7:28f the voice of God speaks of "my Son the Messiah" (cfr. also 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9), R. H. Charles considers Enoch 105:2 to be of Chasidic or Pharisean authorship: "The Lord bade them to . . . testify: . . . I and My Son will be united with them . . ."

The hypothesis that contemporary Jewish messianism could think of the Christ as divine is perhaps also supported by the virulent reactions of the clergy when Jesus claimed to be "the Son (of God) in a unique sense (Jn. 5:17f; 10:24-39; 19:7), or even "Son of man" (Jn. 12:23-34).

Although Peter did not derive his understanding of Jesus' Messiahship from his own cultural milieu (16:17), still, the intellectual climate in Israel favored consideration of the Messiah as divine. The deliberateness with which this question of His identity is approached on this occasion argues for the conclusion that the high view of Jesus' identity expressed by Peter is his genuine conviction, because it stands out in contrast to the lower estimates made by public opinion. The only strategem remaining to discount Peter's understanding is to deny any historical validity to this entire account, a tactic actually used by some.

You are the Christ, said Peter, not "an anointed of God." The definiteness of his expression rightly encourages Gresham (*Christian Standard*, 1965, 108) to affirm:

For a Jew to say, "You are the Christ," means more than the average man can realize. The term "Christ" or "Messiah" means the anointed one, and in its Messianic use, it catches up into its ultimate significance all the typical offices God set in Israel, guaranteed by special anointing. Thus, Aaron and his sons were anointed and designated high priests (Leviticus 8). Prophets were anointed (1 Kings 19:16), signifying the approval of the Lord

concerning their message. Kings were anointed (1 Kings 19:15f; 1 Samuel 16:13) by the prophet of God, indicating whom God would have rule over His covenant people. In light of this background, the Jew believed that the Messiah would fulfill all these relations and offices perfectly, adequately and universally.

The great confession was, and is, a confession of content. If we would stand with Peter and express the conviction of our hearts as he, we must believe that Jesus of Nazareth fulfills the prophetic office of God, bringing that final Word from God in His own person and through His work (See Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:18; 14:7-10; cf. Dt. 18:15-18; Lk. 24:19; Ac. 3:22; 7:37) If we would give adequate answer to our Lord's query, "Who do you say that I am?" we must affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is our only high priest, who in His own body made adequate sacrifice for iniquity and uncleanness, and who now continues His priestly work at the Father's right hand (See Hebrews 7-10; cf. Psalms 110:4; Romans 8:34) If we would confess that Jesus is the Christ in the meaningfulness of its first context, we must submit to His kingly power and enthrone Him as Lord of our lives (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:6-11; cf. Psalms 2:6; Zechariah 9:9; Mt. 21:5; Lk. 1:32f; Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 11:15; 12:10; 17:14; 19:11-16)

The content of this confession must include these items: Jesus of Nazareth is God's truth-revealing prophet, sinful man's adequate high priest and sacrifice, and the world's ultimate monarch.

While it is true that Peter did not always do honor to his great confession made here (see on 16:22), his inconsistency does not change anything either of the sincerity with which he voiced or of the truth to which he gave assent. Any discussion of Peter's understanding must always weigh into the balance Jesus' satisfaction with Peter's affirmation and His identification of its source. (16:17)

To entitle Jesus as "the Christ of God" (Mk. 8:29; Lk. 9:20) is to admit that His representation of God's intentions for Israel's Messiah is the correct one, regardless of how drastically His humble life of service contradicted human preconceptions. By implication, we recognize that His attitudes and activities must guide and judge ours, since our commitment to Him as God's Anointed means that we bow before both His conceptual revelations as well as those acted out in His life-style as Servant of the Lord. (See on 16:24.)

Peter honors the Father of Jesus as **the living God**; because He stands in direct contrast to dead idols (cf. Jer. 10:6-10; Hos. 1:10;

Isa. 40) The God revealed by Jesus His Son is real, alive and active! (Cf. Jn. 6:57; Ro. 9:26)

5. Jesus' Joy and Promises to Peter (16:17-19)

16:17 **And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.** The beatitude-formula means to represent the one described as particularly happy or well-off. (Cf. on Mt. 5:3-12) **Blessed art thou:** "You are happy indeed!" or "How favored you are!" **Blessed are you, Simon,** even though your understanding of the content of your grand affirmation is severely limited! **Blessed are you,** even though you can hardly imagine all that it means for me to be the Christ or Son of God, as God intends these terms. By comparison to all that you will later understand about these high concepts, what you have just said is but baby-talk expressing a child's understanding. But **blessed are you,** because your confession is true and sincere, and backed by all the authority of God.

Blessed art thou is but the echo of "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear . . . Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Mt. 13:16f) This is why Jesus' commendation of Peter is not totally unique, since the same blessedness is available to anyone open to receive the information God provides him through the life-character and prophetic credentials of Jesus the Nazarene. The Lord singles out Peter as a remarkably happy man because he has believed the testimony of all the evidences that God had worked through the miracles and prophecies of Jesus, hence was really a solid believer. If faith, then, is the trust of testimony to the reality of the facts about Jesus, then anyone today who believes the same facts on the testimony of the eyewitnesses who accurately report them to us, can share in this blessing by making the same declaration of faith.

Simon Bar-Jonah: why refer to him in this way? Is Jesus striking a contrast between what would have been Peter's personal views as a man and what had to be the result of his observing God's revelations given him?

1. Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 60), discussing this address, argues:

Simon is called *Barjona*, an epithet which is probably equivalent

to "revolutionary," in the sense of one who is desirous of eliminating the Roman oppressors, a sympathizer with the Zealots and, hence, a Galilean longing for national liberty. Given this his nationalistic tendency, Peter could not have spontaneously imagined that Jesus, to whom such ideals were foreign, could have really been the expected Christ. That had to be the fruit of a particular divine revelation.

In support of his interpretation, he cites the Hebrew root *jnh* in the sense of "violent, oppressor" (Jer. 46:16; 50:16; Zeph. 3:1; Psa. 123:4; Ex. 22:21, etc.), seeing a correspondence between the modern Hebrew "birion" and "Barjona." Accordingly, he would see Peter as a "son of the violent" or a Zealot sympathizer if not actually one of them. Not only would this agree with his impetuous character, but it would throw into greater relief the complete dissimilarity between his human views and the high, spiritual Messianic concept he had just confessed.

2. On the other hand, Blass-Debrunner (*Grammar*, §53 (2)) explains *lonâ* as a hybrid Hellenized name which has been abbreviated from *Ioân(n)es* for the even longer Hebrew form *Iochanan*, and therefore equal to *Ioânnou* of Jn. 1:42; 21:15-17. Arndt-Gingrich agree (386). From this standpoint, Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 644) sees "Simon, son of John" as a

. . . reminder of what he was by nature, simply a human son of a human father. He was a man who of himself could not have contributed anything worthwhile, just one human being among many. This reminder is going to be followed shortly (v. 18) by an affirmation of that which by grace this same Simon Bar-Jonah had become, namely a worthy bearer of the name "Cephas" (Aramaic) or "Peter" (Greek).

Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee. Flesh and blood = human in contrast to divine. (See Gal. 1:16; 1 Co. 15:50; Eph. 6:12; cfr. Sirach 14:18; 17:31f) But, is the humanity involved here that of Jesus or of others?

1. Barnes (*Matthew-Mark*, 169) applies the expression to Jesus' own humanity. They had not comprehended His proper dignity by the lordly appearance of His human nature or worldly rank and stature, surrounded with external pomp and power as a man. These were not His insignias of Messiahship, so it was obvious that they had not recognized Him on the basis of His human

splendor. Rather, despite His lowly appearance and lack of resemblance to all that they had expected, they still had glimpsed His glory in His miracles, His matchless life, His teaching in harmony with the Old Testament and the prophecies that were coming true in Him.

2. The grand conclusion reached by Peter and the others who shared it had not been decided by taking samples of public opinion, although, as our text proves, it had not been made in isolation from it. The Twelve expressed what contemporary messianism thought of Jesus the true Messiah (16:13, 14), and, ironically, in the wake of the contemporary messianic understanding, themselves rebuke Jesus for talking in such a way as would overthrow their theories about His Messiahship (16:22f).

How was the glorious truth revealed exclusively **by my Father who is in heaven?** The expression, **flesh and blood has not revealed it**, in antithesis to **my Father**, must not be construed as excluding Jesus' ministry, as if His own humanness (flesh and blood) should be thought to eliminate His ministry from consideration as the source of the revelation. Rather, Jesus argued that all His words and works were derived directly from the Father (Jn. 5:17-36; 8:28; 10:25; 14:10f), and that what He revealed was adequate to lead them to believe. To suppose that His own incarnation in and of itself is inadequate to produce faith without unusual supernatural insight is to misunderstand the purpose of His coming. Had not Jesus toiled for over two years to produce this very conviction in His disciples? Why should His patient struggle with their ignorance and misunderstanding all be forcibly down-graded, forgotten or ignored in the flash of a special miraculous revelation to the mind of Peter? No, the only explaining the great confession is to admit that they were seeing what God in His Old Testament Word and in His Son, the living Word (Jn. 1:1, 14, 18), had been saying to EVERYONE. Carver's reconstruction (*Self-interpretation of Jesus*, 108) bears further consideration:

He has been very patient with these men while they were discovering Him. He did not begin by telling them He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" and asking them to follow Him in that exalted capacity. . . . He waited for His personality (and His supernatural signs, HEF) to compel in them an exalted interpretation. They began following Him as teacher to find that He was "The Teacher." At first He was for them a prophet, to become "The Prophet," and in the end, the Maker of Prophets.

They began following "a friend of sinners" to find themselves heralds of the Redeemer from all sin. Jesus asks only that men will get acquainted with Him and then accept what they find Him to be.

A useful research project at this point would be to study the life of Peter or John as they are brought into contact with Jesus for the first time, with a view to study their individual growth in faith. Notice should be taken of Jesus' claims and deeds recorded up to this time. This method will reveal in precisely what ways God revealed the Messianic dignity of Jesus to Peter through His word and work. We should come to the same conclusions he did and by the same method. This means, further, that Peter's affirmation on Pentecost proves that ANY HEBREW witness of Jesus' ministry could have arrived at his own personal conviction of Jesus' Lordship by recognizing God's power operative in Jesus of Nazareth. (Ac. 2:22) This does not, however, base the final conclusion upon the sole reliability of human reason as distinguished from divine revelation, but rather upon the right use of human intelligence to conclude that a faithful God is actually revealing Himself through Jesus. Peter's own conclusion, then, is neither irrational nor absurd, being correctly arrived at by the proper use of his own intelligence. But it is not based upon human intellect alone. It admits the Lord God's revelations in the Old Testament concerning the nature of the Christ, and then goes on to identify the fulfilled reality in Jesus of Nazareth.

This revelation of the Father to Peter is not an instantaneous, personal inspiration unavailable to everyone else. See notes on 13:16, since the historical context of the great Sermon in Parables (Mt. 13) explains how this glorious truth could be revealed to disciples like Peter, while, at the same time, it lay hidden from so many of Jesus' contemporaries who said so far less about Him than was really true, however high their esteem for Him. So, if this revelation of Jesus' be unavailable to anyone, it is his own fault! (Cf. Mt. 11:25, 26 in context!) Further, as illustrated in 13:17, all the intimate disciples were seeing Jesus for what He really was, and received the same approval as Peter here. Although it is Peter who formulates the great confession, he is quite probably the spokesman of the belief held by the entire group. (Cf. Jn: 6:68f: "WE have believed . . .")

Further, when Peter later acted in direct opposition to a correct application of his confession, his misunderstanding was not corrected by an immediate flash of supernatural inspiration, but by Jesus' stern

rebuke and patient teaching. (16:23-28)

My Father: notice that, far from correcting anything supposedly erroneous in Peter's answer, the Lord affirms His own deity by making His own that expression of unshared Sonship. (Cf. Jn. 5:17ff)

16:18 But I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Before continuing our interpretation of this section, we must ask . . .

IS THIS PASSAGE A HOMOGENEOUS PICTURE?

In their effort to interpret problematic language in this text, some commentators see Jesus' language as painting one, unified picture which consists in one homogeneous, extended rhetorical device in which each of the various elements mentioned combine to complete a scene to be explained more or less literally. They see the following elements:

1. Jesus is the builder.
2. He is about to build His Church (assumed by some to be a city-kingdom).
3. The foundation of His Church is a great rock to be identified.
4. Simon Peter is to be the gate-keeper to this Church (city-kingdom?) by using the keys.
5. The keys Peter uses are those which permit entrance into the Kingdom.
6. The gates (symbol of a city's power) of the city-kingdom of death will be unable to withstand the assaults of Christ's Church.

A bit of circumstantial evidence seeming to confirm the above rhetorical construction comes from the topography. Because this conversation occurred near Caesarea Philippi, a city enjoying a strategic location on the solid rock foundation of the foothills of the Lebanon mountain chain, its very configuration would have furnished Jesus with a powerful, visual illustration of His words. Thus, the Apostles would have comprehended instantly that the Church-image He intended was that of a city-kingdom founded upon a solid mountain base.

If this be the proper reconstruction of Jesus' language, then certain internal conclusions follow:

1. If Jesus is the Builder, He Himself cannot be regarded as the foundation rock of the Church.
2. If Peter is bearer of the keys, he would not be thought of as the foundation either.
3. Therefore, the foundation of the Church must be something other than these two persons whose position in the picture is clearly established.
4. All that is left in the picture to serve as the Church's foundation is Peter's confession, or perhaps something else.

Whatever may be claimed for the above-mentioned extended metaphor, all must admit that it is not without weaknesses, significant among which are the following:

1. Jesus nowhere affirms His intention to present a homogeneous picture similar to that constructed by the logic of its interpreters.
2. The Hebrew mentality back of this conversation (recorded in Greek) has importance for our decision about how to interpret the passage, because, if the presumed imagery of the unified picture is nothing but a series of independent Hebraisms, then the supposedly "unified picture" disintegrates. Each single Semitism, in that case, must be interpreted according to its own literary type, but not necessarily linked with the others, as the "unified picture" concept would require. That a genuinely Hebrew mentality lies back of this conversation is evident from the following expressions: "Bar-Jonah" (if thought of as an Aramaic variant of the Greek "son of John"), "flesh and blood," "kingdom of heaven" (instead of "kingdom of God"), "binding and loosing," and the typically Hebrew word-play based on a name (even in Greek!)

The presumption that a conversation in Aramaic stands back of the text of our Greek Matthew cannot be established merely by the presence of Hebraeo-Aramaisms translated into Greek, since no one at this late date can determine objectively who did the translating: Jesus Himself as He spoke, or Matthew as he wrote.

Consider also the Hebraisms involved in the following objections:

3. The rhetorical fiction of the two city-kingdoms takes little or no account of the play on Peter's name in connection with the rock foundation upon which the Church should be built.
4. Also, the Church, in the presumed imagery of this section, is never

called a city-kingdom in this context. This must be assumed to complete the picture. The expression "gates of Hades" need not suggest "the gates of the kingdom of heaven." Nor need the "keys of the Kingdom" promised to Peter, imply that they are for use in opening the Kingdom's gates, but even if so, that would not depend upon this figure, but upon their own literary connection.

5. Again, no explanation is given of the switch from the image of the construction of a city-kingdom upon a mighty rock foundation to the image of a man binding and loosing certain objects. (16:19) A change of figure in the very verse that speaks of the consignment of the keys of the kingdom of Peter weakens the reconstructed rhetorical device supposedly intended by Jesus.
6. Are the functions of "bearer of the keys" and "foundation-stone" mutually exclusive? Only if we superimpose an invented rhetorical device upon the text.

Further weaknesses appear in the way the data have been organized into what appeared to be an air-tight metaphorical picture. The error can be exposed by simply furnishing another image that utilizes the same language-data:

1. Christ is the Builder, or Founder, of His Congregation, or Assembly (*ekklesia*).
2. Peter the believer is a basis (= foundation stone) in that living congregation.
3. The gates of death (= the city of the dead) is powerless to imprison that congregation within its walls:
 - a. Both in the sense that Christ would burst those gates, rising from the dead to establish His congregation of believers.
 - b. And in the sense that the Church too would crash death's gates from within and come forth, victorious over death.

In this alternative picture, the Church is seen as having real existence only in Christ who must Himself enter the gates of the city of the dead, the grave. According to this construction, then, we must not think of the Church as a great city-kingdom on the outside of Hades and warring against the latter kingdom. In fact, Jesus said nothing about that in this text. Rather, we must understand the Church as "in Christ" (a thoroughly Pauline concept), having real existence only in relation to Him. This means that the Church was in Hades with Christ during the time of His death, just as really as Christ was within the "gates of Hades." If He intends also a future prophecy

regarding the Church in a time after His resurrection, then, He means that the Church would enjoy all the benefits of victory over death by resurrection.

Because of the above-mentioned weaknesses in the former rhetorical reconstruction, the method followed in this study will be the consideration of the idiomatic expressions used by Jesus, taken individually and not as part of a rhetorical whole, except as each expression by its nature demands.

In the history of the exegesis of this text, positions have been taken that, in some cases, have produced grievous consequences in the Body of Christ. In the case of most questions afflicted with extreme stances, the truth usually lies somewhere near the middle, roughly halfway between the extremes. The exegetical history of our text has seen its interpreters divided into about three major groups: those who see Peter the man as the Rock-foundation of the Church, those who see Peter's confession as the Rock, and those who affirm Christ to be the Rock. Is it not possible that, for good and sufficient reasons, the truth may well lie somewhere near the middle between these extremes? This is no plea for that indifferentism, that middle-of-the-road-ism, that refuses to choose between hard alternatives. In fact, the choice of a mediating position is often one requiring no little courage, because it is then exposed to the fiery objections from the contenders for the extreme positions. This, however, is not mediation for mediation's sake, but because—at least in our present case—the truth appears to lie between the above-mentioned positions. For sake of clarity, these positions will be dealt with in the following order:

1. Peter is not intended:
 - a. God the great Rock of Israel is meant.
 - b. Christ Himself is meant.
 - c. The faith that formed the content of Peter's confession is meant.
2. Peter is intended:
 - a. Peter the man is made earthly Head of the Church.
 - b. Peter the believer, symbol of all who confess this truth, is meant.

I. PETER IS NOT INTENDED

"You are Peter, a man of rock, worthy of your name, because you have given expression to the revealed truth of my Messiahship and divine Sonship. Your name suggests a symbolic name for what shall

be the Rock upon which I establish my Church."

Those who reject Peter as the intended reference notice the distinction in gender between the words Jesus used. Jesus referred to Peter by his masculine name, *Pétros*, but identified the Church's foundation by using a feminine noun, *pétra*, thereby distinguishing the two. Further, *Pétros*, it is pointed out, refers to "a stone," in general contrast to *pétra*, "bedrock, a great rock cliff, etc." Thus, whatever is represented by the term *pétra* is certainly not *Pétros*! Peter, accordingly, is but a small stone incapable of supporting the Church. The sure foundation must be sought elsewhere.

Because this view is based entirely upon the Greek record of Matthew, its opponents notice that it would be seriously weakened if it be admitted that Jesus were speaking Aramaic at the moment, and that our author rendered in Greek the sense of the Aramaic. The supposition is that the nice distinctions of the Greek are not respected in Aramaic which adopts the same word for Peter (*Cephas*) as for rock (*Cefa*). Proponents of the view then answer that the Holy Spirit guided Matthew's selection among the Greek synonyms, deciding upon that word in Greek which correctly represented the mind of the Lord. Thus, no appeal can be made to a supposed Aramaic original of the text in question, since the final Greek original of Matthew bears the divine stamp of that Apostle's inspiration and consequent authority.

It is further argued by those who reject the man Peter as intended by Jesus' word-play, that had Jesus intended to establish the Church on Peter, He would not have been so ambiguous. Instead, He would have affirmed: "and on you I will build my Church."

A. GOD, THE GREAT ROCK OF ISRAEL, IS INTENDED.

1. In favor of this view three points are noted:
 - a. The confession of Peter mentions the name of God. ("the living God")
 - b. Jesus also mentioned the "Father who is in heaven" as the source of Peter's confession.
 - c. In the Hebrew Biblical literature God is pictured as the great mass of rock that protects and blesses Israel. (Dt. 32; 2 Sam. 22:32 = Psa. 18:31)
2. Against this view, it must be noticed that, while God the Father is part of the larger literary and historical context, there are other

possibilities much closer to our text. The expression "upon THIS rock," unless compelling reasons demand otherwise, would be badly applied to words or phrases too far away.

B. CHRIST HIMSELF IS THE INTENDED ROCK

1. In favor of this view the following evidences are cited:
 - a. Christ is pictured as the Rock or as a Foundation in other texts. (1 Co. 3:11; 10:4; Lk. 20:17, 18; Ac. 4:11; 1 Pt. 2:4-8)
 - b. Mention is also made of the difference in gender and meaning between *Pétros* and *pétra*, a factor which facilitates a reference to someone other than Peter.
2. Against this view the following objections should be registered:
 - a. This view introduces confusion into the imagery presumed to be essential to Jesus' rhetoric. That is, if Jesus is the Architect of the Church, how can He properly be considered to be the stone foundation also in the same metaphor?
 - b. If, according to many, it be assumed that the Church be pictured in our text as a great city-kingdom founded upon a rock foundation, then none of the above-cited texts are of any use, because they all involve quite different rhetorical images. When Paul laid Jesus Christ as the Church's foundation at Corinth (1 Co. 3:11), another image is involved: that of an artificial foundation for a temple. (1 Co. 3:9-16) Paul "put" (*étheke*) the foundation that now "lay" (*keimenon*) there. Nothing is said about digging down to the rock, because the figure is another. Nor can 1 Co. 10:4 help the theory, since the "Rock that followed (*akolouthouses pétras*) them was the Christ," was a rock at various places in the desert from which Moses drew water, hence no symbol of a fixed, unmovable foundation for the Church. In the other texts He is no longer the foundation stone, as required by this view, but the "corner-stone."
 - c. *Pétra*, used in reference to Christ does not necessarily refer to a massive rock foundation, since Peter calls Jesus "the stone (*lithos*) of stumbling and the rock (*pétra*) of offence." (1 Pt. 2:8) In our rhetoric, do men normally stumble over massive mountains of rock, or, rather, against rocks of more modest proportions?
 - d. If the distinction in meaning between *Pétros* and *pétra* be thought important, why not be consistent and notice also the

distinctions between Greek words in the above-cited texts where Jesus is called a "stone" (*lithos*), "foundation" (*themélion*), "rock" (*pétra*). "cornerstone" (*akrogoniáion*)? Do not these different words intend also to indicate distinct meanings? If so, then why unite them with *pétra* against *Pétros*? If not, then why pit *Pétros* against *pétra*?

- e. Even if it is true that the divine basis of the Church cannot be a man as such, but only the Christ (cfr. 1 Co. 3:11), we must ask the question: is Jesus presented in our text as the foundation of the Church *directly*, or only *indirectly* through the confession of Peter, just as is true for all the Apostles in Eph. 2:20?

C. PETER'S CONFESSION IS THE ROCK

1. In favor of this view, the following points have been noted:
 - a. The difference in the Greek words is noted: *Pétros* = "a stone"; *pétra* = "a solid rock foundation." It is as if Jesus had said, "You are Peter, truly a man of stone, and upon what makes you that, i.e. the truth you have just confessed, I will found my Church. Though a man of rock yourself, you are but a small stone compared to the solid, massive, bed-rock foundation—i.e. my messianic dignity and my divine Sonship—upon which I establish my Church.
 - b. The validity of this view is further based contextually upon the imagery supposed to be in Jesus' mind. Thus, if Jesus is the Builder of the Church-Kingdom and for which Peter is but the keyholder, then the Rock must be something other than these two. Having identified all other parts of this (supposed) picture, one is driven to conclude that the confession of Peter is itself the Rock.
 - c. The appropriateness of the imagery used to represent the ideas communicated would be ruined, were it supposed that such a momentous institution as the Church should be pictured as established upon so human a foundation as the man Peter. Regardless of the preciousness and lofty conception of Peter's conviction, Peter the man is still human. Contrarily, the glorious proposition to which he gave voice stands above all that is human ("flesh and blood did not reveal this"). Rather, this mighty truth is of divine origin ("my Father in heaven").
 - d. Further, the resurrection faith preached by the Apostles centered

around their conviction of the Messiahship and Lordship of Christ, not around the shallow glory and secondary importance of the man Peter. Thus, only the truth confessed is an appropriate, stable basis for the Church.

2. Against this view the following objections should be noticed:

- a. Jesus adopted the pronoun "THIS" (*taùte*), not "that" (*ekeïne*), "upon THIS rock," a demonstrative that points, not to something further back in the context, such as the confession of Peter made a few minutes before, but to something more immediate. In that case it would have been more logical to say, "upon THAT rock." (*epì ekeïne tê pétra*)
- b. The validity of making such wide distinctions in the Greek words *Pétros* and *pétra* will be discussed under II. "Peter Is Intended,"
- c. The question of "appropriateness of imagery" may turn out to be subjective taste, if it can be demonstrated that another different view arrives at the same goal of rendering the true meaning of this text by providing equally appropriate alternatives.
- d. The faith preached by the Apostles after Jesus' resurrection was not merely intellectual assent to the right view of Jesus' Lordship and Messiahship. Rather, they labored to produce that fine balance so well expressed by Paul: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27) This is truth alive in human personality, a larger expression of the confession Peter voiced. So, the cold, naked confession, considered alone, is actually a weaker basis for human transformation than previously imagined, hence, less appropriate as the Church's basis, at least in this sense.

II. PETER IS INTENDED

Before entering into a consideration of the applications to be made of the data pointing to Peter, let us first examine the data.

1. The contextual data; the near context is tightly focused upon Peter:
 - a. The blessing upon Peter by name for his confession. (v. 17)
 - b. The word-play made upon the name of Peter. (v. 18)
 - c. The particular mission of Peter. (v. 19)
 Taken together, these factors recommend that we apply to Peter the intervening material whereinsofar this is possible.

2. The mechanical guideposts as signs of meaning:

- a. Jesus begins v. 18 by saying: "And I say to you (*kagò dé soi légo*)" as if happy to confess Peter for what he is, even as Peter had confessed Him according to His true identity. Peter had said, "You are the Christ, the Son of God." Now Jesus says, "You are Peter." Much earlier the Lord had said, "*You are Simon son of John. You shall be called Peter.*" (Jn. 1:42) Here, on the other hand, He affirms, "*You are Peter,*" even now what the name implies. So, the double confessions, i.e. that of Peter and this of Christ, leads the reader to notice Peter in some special way.
- b. Another mechanical detail drawing attention to Peter is the word "THIS ROCK" (*taùte tê pétra*). Should Jesus have meant to refer to some object outside the immediate sentence, He would have said "THAT ROCK" (*ekeïne tê pétra*). Unless some reference to Peter is intended, further clarification is needed in the sentence to turn the gaze of the reader away from Peter and toward some other unnamed object.
- c. The Greek nouns *Pétros* and *pétra* are not so mutually exclusive as usually defended by apologists. Everyone will agree that *pétros*, taken as a common noun (not a name), may mean "a small stone" in contrast to *pétra*, "a great rock cliff."
 - (1) Nevertheless, in its own linguistic history, *pétros* has been used as a synonym of imperturbability or hardness (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 334). Reference is even made in Euripides (*Medea*, 28) to "the rock-cliff of Thorikia" (*ho Thorikios pétros*) according to Rocci, 1494. Therefore, at a significant point in their spheres of meaning, *pétros* and *pétra* can have overlapping connotations, i.e. they can both mean "rock-cliff, ledge of rock."

(The same phenomenon occurs in Italian where "sasso" means "a pebble," but "Gran Sasso d'Italia" means "the Great Massif of Italy," a tract of the Appennine range that most looks like high mountains!)
 - (2) Further, even *pétra* can sometimes indicate a rock of modest proportions. Both Paul (Ro. 9:33) and Peter (1 Pt. 2:8) cite the parallel use of *lithos* and *pétra*, appearing in Isa. 8:14. (See note at I, B, 2, c above)

See Salvoni's citations (*Da Pietro al papato*, 63, note 9) of Homer, *Odyssey*, 9,243; Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 675; *Widom of Solomon*, 17:19 LXX=17:17. The exchange

of these nouns is affirmed in the second century after Christ by the anatomist Claudius Galeno (XII, 194)

In English the same phenomenon occurs in the word "rock": just how big is a "rock"? It can refer to anything from "a rock to throw at rabbits," to the "Rock of Gibraltar." Only the context can determine the size of the rock in question.

So, if the Greeks used *pétros* and *pétra* with some of the same liberty, and sometimes interchangeably, then our interpretation of these words in our text must be determined from the context, and not so much from a mechanical use of wooden definitions.

- d. Regardless of the external measurements of the object to which each word *pétros* and *pétra* is supposed to refer, they are, after all, composed of the same material, a fact that cannot help but cause the mind to connect the two in some intimate way.
- e. Jesus had surnamed Simon "Cephas-Peter" at their first encounter. (Jn. 1:42) What motivated the Lord to do that? If He meant for this characterizing label to indicate some essential quality of the man, to what side of Peter's make-up and especially to what phase of his future work in the Church would He be referring by calling him a "little rock, pebble or stone"? And did He not, rather, by prophetic insight, name him *Cephas-Pétros* in view of his latent capacity for faith and the rock-like spiritual power he would personally contribute to the stability of the Church?

In fact, we are so accustomed to the Apostle's new name that we forget that, originally, it needed to be translated for the common readers of John's Gospel (Jn. 1:42). To sense the original flavor of that scene, we should render it in English: "You shall be called Cephas (which means Rock)." However, prior to Jesus' naming Simon *Céphas-Pétros*, how common was this expression as a normal masculine name? In fact, if *Céphas-Pétros* were NOT a common name in our literature and among the Jewish-Greek speakers of Palestine, then attention would be immediately called to the root significance of that common noun made into a proper name. In this case, only with time would it become commonly known as a proper name because of the fame of the Apostle and used in all the normal situations and combinations common to proper names, e.g. "Simon Peter."

However, Edersheim (*Life*, II, 82) cites, as proof that the name *Pétros* is Jewish, the father of a certain rabbi (José bar Petros), without, however, identifying the date of his source, Pesiqta, ed. Buber, p. 158a, line 8 from bottom. Unless this source is undoubtedly pre-Christian, then the name could have entered Jewish culture from Christian sources rather than vice versa.

Pétros, as a name, can scarcely be pre-Christian. (Arndt-Gingrich, 660) But the prior question, of course, is whether *CEPHAS* were known as a proper masculine name before the first century, since *Pétros*, as it first appears in the NT at Jn. 1:42, only furnishes the Greek translation for Jesus' Aramaic choice. *Cephas*, etymologically linked with the masculine noun *ceph* (= "rock") which is used only twice (Job 30:6 and Jer. 4:29), does not appear in the OT as a name, but is clearly based upon it. (Gesenius, 410 and Scerbo, 139, both link it with NT *Cephas*.) Further, whereas it was formerly thought that *Cepha* were a feminine noun, Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 62, note 4) indicates that now, however, the critics, on the basis of the Palestinian Targums and Samaritan Targum, recognize it as a masculine noun and therefore applicable to a man. Now, whether or not our Greek text reflects an Aramaic conversation, it nevertheless mirrors the Aramaic word-play that Jesus Himself deliberately set up by naming Peter *Cephas*. Whether or not the conversation took place in Greek or Aramaic makes absolutely no difference, because the final result is the same:

- (1) If Jesus said only two Aramaic words in His Greek sentence (i.e. "You are *Cephas* and upon this *ceph* I will build my Church."), the very change from second person ("You are") to third person ("upon this") points to two concepts, not just one. The pun shows the intimate link, while the change of person shows the distinction.
- (2) If Jesus spoke the whole sentence in Greek exactly as recorded by Matthew, then, He renders Simon's name in Greek *Pétros*, while using the feminine *pétra* to underline the characteristic in Peter upon which He would establish His congregation. Thus, in Greek we have not only the change of persons (from second to third), but also the change of gender to indicate the distinction. Nevertheless, the etymological affinity of the two words, brought out in the word-play,

establishes the intimate link between their concepts. Foster (*Middle Period*, 235) distinguishes *Pétros* from *pétra* as also *Cephas* from *cepha*. On the latter pair he argues that coining a man's name from a feminine word *cepha* automatically makes it a different word with a different signification. But this emphasis fails to recognize that the very act of coining a proper name from a common noun instantly calls attention to the common noun, regardless of which language is used.

This is, of course, increasingly less true the farther the new name travels from its original source. Many common names have meanings that originally characterized the person so named. For example, *Harold* is an old Norse word meaning "Powerful Warrior, army leader." *Edward* is Anglosaxon for a trusted steward, a guardian of property. *Fowler* is English for a hunter of wild fowl. So far are we from the origins! The actual names of the current labor union leaders in Italy, rendered in English, are Mr. Crooked, Mr. Badly-made and Mr. Little (Sigg. Storti, Malfatti e Piccoli)!

So, "Rock" or "Rocky" calls attention to "rock," not vice versa. The net result of these considerations is that, when Jesus made His famous pun, His hearers' mind easily would run from *Pétros* to *pétra* and back in a close, natural identification in terms. But, if something about Peter is the object of Jesus' thought, what conclusions may be drawn therefrom?

A. PETER THE MAN IS MADE EARTHLY HEAD OF THE CHURCH, VICAR OF CHRIST.

1. In favor of this view, the following points are argued:
 - a. Granted that all NT doctrine exalts the primacy of Christ in heaven and on earth, this primacy properly requires human expression on earth during the physical absence of Christ. This principle of representation of God by human officials is illustrated in OT religion, the typical preparation for the new, in its high priest, its prophets and its kings. Because Jesus is their typical fulfilment, but physically absent, and because the Holy Spirit is present only invisibly, human need for divine representation is met by Christ's human delegate, or vicar, who acts on His behalf. But any human delegate must have

proper credentials to identify him as such. Mt. 16:18f constitutes the necessary proof of the transmission of this authority and establishes Peter as Christ's Vicar. In this position, Peter and his successors upon whom episcopal hands have been laid, become the lineal self-projection of Christ Himself in the world. Because of certain historical circumstances, the bishop of Rome is the lineal successor to the Chair of Peter.

- b. The leading position of Peter in the apostolic group and in the life of the early Church is striking confirmation of the authority with which he is invested in this text.
2. Beyond what has already been written on "The Supremacy of Peter" (Vol. II, 274ff), the following objections to this expression of the Roman Catholic position are raised:
 - a. Jesus did not say, "You are Peter and upon you I will build my Church," but rather "upon this rock," a fact that, while admittedly linking Peter and the *pétra*, points away from Peter the man to some characteristic that he and the Church's foundation share in common.
 - b. John 20:21 furnishes the following precious elements of proof to the contrary:
 - (1) Jesus' self-projection in the world is not to be accomplished by a single vicar, but by a plurality of disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you (plural: *humâs*)."
 - Many NT texts explain that the mission of the total Church is but the extension of Jesus' activity in the world. (Cf. Jn. 12:26; 14:12-20; Mt. 28:20; Ro. 12:4-8; 1 Co. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:23; 4:4, 12-16; 5:30; Col. 1:27, 28; 1 Jn. 4:17)
 - (2) Jesus' commission was given on this occasion to both apostolic and non-apostolic disciples present. Peter was not alone, as other Apostles were present. (Jn. 20:19-21) If this is the same appearance recorded in Lk. 24:13 (cf. Jn. 20:19), two of the non-apostolic disciples are mentioned: Cleopas and his friend. (Lk. 24:18) It was while these latter were retelling Jesus' Emmaus-Road appearance to them that He Himself appeared to the Eleven. (Lk. 24:36)
 - (3) The gift of the Holy Spirit is breathed indiscriminately upon them, not just upon Peter. (Jn. 20:22)
 - (4) The solemn promise is made that men's sins would be forgiven or retained through *THESE* disciples. (Jn. 20:23)
 - c. Jesus established no hierarchy on earth and deliberately blocked any possibility of its later development by men claiming divine

- approval. (Mt. 20:25-28; cf. Lk. 22:24-30; Mt. 23:8-12) The very character of Christian liberty—i.e. the freedom to act responsibly without surrendering one's right to decide by turning it over to the despotism of hierarchical legalism or to a "Teaching Authority" (Magisterium)—eliminates the need for a continuous judicial or legislative hierarchy. (See Special Study after Mt. 15:20: "How to Avoid Being a Pharisee"; cfr. also Mt. 23:8-12 where Jesus outlawed glorification of any teaching authority.)
- d. None of the other Apostles interpreted any part of this verse as establishing Peter over them in any hierarchical sense. Their debates about their own relative importance prove that this point had not been settled by Jesus in this text and situation. (Cf. Mt. 18:1ff) The request of James and John for places of honor,—a request which, intentionally or involuntarily, would cut Peter out,—may also indicate that they did not interpret His words as placing Peter on such a throne as that of the "Holy See." (Mt. 20:20-28) The New Jerusalem has only twelve apostolic foundations, none of which is described as more important than the others. (Rev. 21:14, 19ff) There were fully 12 judgment thrones, not just one for Peter. (Mt. 19:28)
 - e. Peter himself, to whom any personal dictatorship was foreign, saw his position as that of a "fellow elder" charged with "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." (1 Pt. 5:1-5) The Apostle, especially charged with the responsibility to "Feed my lambs," pictures His Lord as "the Shepherd and Guardian (Bishop) of your souls" (1 Pt. 2:25) and "the chief Shepherd." (1 Pt. 5:4)
 - f. Whatever may be affirmed for Peter in this text (16:18), in no sense is he either the real Founder ("I will build") nor the Owner ("my Church"). These fundamental roles are filled only by Christ Himself. (Eph. 1:22; 4:11-15; 5:23ff)
 - g. Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 80) points out that . . .

. . . the context refers to a particular point in the history of the Church, i.e. its establishment: "I will build my Church." It is therefore in that precise moment that Peter's activity must take place . . . a fact which excludes both the function of Head and the continuance of such a function for the entire history of the Church.

- h. Again, Salvoni (*ibid.*, 123-125, 146-150, 153) shows that the early Church did not recognize in this passage a hierarchical

superiority of office for Peter, because the church at Jerusalem was more prone, after Peter's departure from Jerusalem (cfr. Ac. 12:17; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pt. 5:13), to follow the leadership of James the Lord's brother. How could the Judaizing element of the Jerusalem Church justify their glorification of James, if everyone knew that Peter had been appointed Vicar by Christ? Also, those in the post-apostolic Church who tended to glorify John among the Apostles do not see Peter as Head of the universal Church or of the Apostolic college. If Peter's episcopal primacy was clear from the beginning, how is this phenomenon to be explained?

- i. The major misunderstanding represented by the papal view is its uncanny lack of fundamental sensitivity to the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom. What are "authorized representatives and vicars" worth, if they ignore the nature of Jesus' kingdom and the type of influence He desires to be expressed in the world, i.e., spiritual transformation by moral methods, as opposed to materialistic manifestations, mechanical rule or hierarchical authority? Of what use are living authorities, when men will obey or reject the authoritative voice of the Apostles and Prophets now dead, and when men may be judged on the basis of their response to these, just as well as by their response to living authorities?
- j. The attitude of Paul toward Peter is especially revealing:
 - (1) He stoutly denied that his apostleship depended upon any man, especially upon those who preceded him chronologically in the apostleship at Jerusalem. (Gal. 1:11-17)
 - (2) He rejected the popular estimate of the so-called "pillars," since God shows no such partiality, and affirmed that he received nothing essential from them. (Gal. 2:6-10) Note that Paul mentions the Three of Jerusalem as "*reputed* to be pillars," but does not affirm that they *are* pillars. Next he sets them in this order: James before Peter, then John. How could Paul have talked like this, had Peter really been proclaimed head by Christ and His Vicar?
 - (3) He shared a world mission at least as great as that of Peter (if not actually greater numerically!), the only real difference being that Peter's mission was to one nation (the Jews), whereas Paul was entrusted with that to all nations (the Gentiles). (Gal. 2:7-10)
 - (4) Paul had no fear to oppose Peter resolutely when he saw

him move away from the Gospel truth. (Gal. 2:11)

- (5) When there arose at Corinth a division honoring Peter, Paul did not for once admit that it was essential to belong to Peter in order to belong to Christ, as if Peter should have been recognized as Christ's vicar. Rather, he thundered that one must belong only to Christ. (1 Co. 1:12ff) Later, Paul affirmed that the Apostles, Peter included, are but simple servants of the Christians. (1 Co. 3:4, 5, 21-23)
- k. The entire New Testament doctrine that sees Christ as now enjoying the primacy in heaven *and on earth* militates against any concept of Peter or anyone as the substitute of Christ. (Cfr. Ephesians, Colossians, and the "once-for-all quality" of Christ's sacrifice and the permanence of His high-priesthood in Hebrews.) The Roman Catholic position fails to understand that God has exalted Christ as Head of the Church, that "in EVERYTHING He might be pre-eminent." (Col. 1:18)

B. PETER IS PICTURED AS TYPICAL OF ALL WHO CONFESS THIS TRUTH.

It is as if Jesus had said, "In you, Peter, I have just hit solid rock, just the kind of rock—*this divine truth alive in human personality*,—upon which I will found my congregation of the new Israel." Thus, He makes Peter typical of all in whom this divine truth is found, and out of whom He could construct His Kingdom.

1. Beyond the arguments listed above under II. PETER IS INTENDED, consider the following arguments in favor of this interpretation of the symbolism inherent in the words *Pétros* and *pétra*:
 - a. Only this view explains adequately the word-play made upon the name of Peter.
 - (1) Only this view explains why Jesus did not say, "You are Peter, and upon you I will build my Church." The Church is not to be constructed upon Peter the man as its only foundation. Rather, Jesus affirmed: "You are Rock and upon this rock I will build . . ." i.e. upon that quality in you, as the first confessor, which makes a good base for the Church: truth alive in the human personality of Peter who recognized Jesus for what God knew Him to be.
 - (2) The rock upon which the Church is built, then, is not just

bare truth nor mere humans, but upon that fine combination of the two which we call Christians. Peter, by his bold confession of the conviction of his heart, proved himself to be the first disciple, the first Christian, deliberately tested and found solidly in harmony with all that God was revealing to men through Jesus.

- (3) Only this view adequately explains the use of the masculine and feminine nouns, *Pétros* and *pétra*. If it be true that *pétra* refers to the larger mass of rock and *pétros* to the smaller, the union of these two ideas in the same sentence draws attention to the fact that the one rock (*Pétros* = Peter) standing before Jesus, is a splendid specimen of the sort of rock (*pétra*) upon which He could finally begin building His Church. The *Pétros* comes from the *pétra*! They are of the same material, a fact that draws attention to what they have in common. Jesus did not say, "You are Peter, BUT upon this rock," but "You are Peter AND upon this rock," a fact that unites and coordinates the ideas. Peter is but a symbol of that upon which the Church is built: *divine truth alive and incarnated in human personality*.
- b. The rhetorical error of those who do not see Peter as the symbol of the rock, is their unproven assumption that Jesus intended to indicate a rock mountain, when it is conceivable that He really intended a rock for construction. After all, how big is a rock (*pétra*)? (See Greek citations on *pétra*, *pétros* under II) Only the superimposition of the subjective picture (illustrated earlier) sees the Church as a City-Kingdom situated on a mountain, whereas Jesus' mental picture might be that of a temple built upon a series of stones constituting a foundation which itself is laid upon solid rock. But since Jesus expressed no mental image other than that of a congregation (*ekklesia*) constructed upon a definite basis (*epì taùte tê pétra*), perhaps we would do well to dispense entirely with mental images projected back into Jesus' mind!
- c. In order properly to interpret the rock upon which the Church is to be built, we must ask a question usually assumed already to have been answered: what does it mean to "build upon"? (*oikodomeso epì* . . .) If it means "to establish something upon something else as its foundation or basis," then we must realize that there are as many bases for a concept as grand as the Church as there are standpoints from which it may be viewed.

- (1) The Church has a *theological* basis: justification by faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice of the divine-human Christ.
- (2) The Church has also a *functional* basis: the conversion of individuals by submission to Christ, and their empowering by gifts of the Holy Spirit (both ordinary and special) whereby the whole body effectively builds itself up toward maturity and does Christ's work in the world.
- (3) The Church has a *historical* basis: the mighty acts of God realized in time and space in the person of Jesus and the Apostles, as well as in the preparation made by the prophets and the Law.
- (4) The Church has a *spiritual* foundation also: its goals and methods, as well as its incentives, take their form from their Designer, God, Who is spirit, not carnal nor material.
- (5) The Church has an *economic* basis upon which it operates: its possessions are freely shared because viewed as God's property to be responsibly administered by individual stewards.
- (6) The Church has a *personal* basis: rather than function as a power block to achieve its goals, it begins with the creation of new men and women who, because of the truth incarnate in them and because of what this makes them become and do, are capable of being the body of Christ in the world.
- (7) The Church has a *social* basis: not limited to a vertical, individual relationship to God, the Church not only draws her members from the world, but converts them and returns them to function in the world to leaven society.

NOW, UPON WHICH OF THESE (OR OTHER) BASES DID JESUS BUILD HIS CHURCH? The total New Testament answer is, of course, ALL OF THEM. But to which did He refer *in our text*? Too long we have presumed that He meant to indicate only the theological or Christological foundation, when He may well have meant the PERSONAL basis or foundation. It is the conviction of this writer that the latter is the case.

d. Should it shock anyone that God or Christ should found His Church upon men like Peter, let the following observations be made:

- (1) Other passages clearly reveal that it is NOT UPON MEN ALONE that Christ founds His Church.
 - (a) Everything depends upon the fulfilment of the plan of God.

- (b) Without *Christ*, nothing would be possible, because He carried out God's part on earth.
 - (c) Further, it is precisely by means of the proclamation of *the truth* of the messianic dignity and divine Sonship of Jesus, that the Church was created, is edified and brought to maturity.
 - (d) However, without the spontaneous participation of *MEN*, there could be no Church, because the Church (*ekklesia*) is, by definition, an assembly constituted of *MEN*, i.e. of believers in whom the confession of Peter is a living conviction.
- (2) It does not please God to see truth reduced to a fleshless abstraction, nor men living without truth. God's ideal is to incarnate truth in the heart of a man, so that by means of this perfect incarnation, God's intentions for creating man might be realized.
- (a) When God set His plan in motion to redeem the human race, He incarnated His truth in a Man, Jesus Christ.
 - (b) Similarly, when Jesus Christ set in motion His plan to establish His Church, He sought some men in whom His truth had become a living reality. And He found it first in the person of Simon Peter. (And many others too: John 17)
- e. From this standpoint, the man Peter is no longer of any help to those who would establish an ecclesiastical hierarchy upon him. In fact, that which renders *Pétros* like *pétra* is the same thing that makes all other believers into "living stones." (1 Pt. 2:4, 5) For *pétra* Edersheim (*Life*, II, 83) coins the useful English paraphrase: "that which was the Petrine in Peter." As a result, the only primacy ("firstness") left for Peter, therefore, is the chronological primacy expressed in the honor to make the first proclamation of the faith that he, as the first, had confessed. As a result, what was Petrine in Peter earned him the joy to be the first stone in the chronological order to be laid in place. Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 65) has it:

To the chronologically first confessor Jesus entrusts an important part in the building of the Church, in the sense that He leaves to him the announcement of the fundamental decisions regarding entrance into the Church, thus rendering the Apostle a sort of permanent base, in as much as all

believers who want to enter the family of God will have to own the profession of faith made by Peter and obey the norms that he will sanction once for all time: baptism without circumcision. . . . Peter's function is an activity or condition connected with the establishing of the Church, a fact which would happen only once in the history of the world. Once the Church had been founded, it would rest upon Peter only in the sense that Simon Barjona, by means of the inspired passage in Matthew's Gospel, continues to proclaim that his confession of faith is indispensable to enter into the Church. The fleshly human Simon will die; but the confessing Simon is eternally alive in the sense that the Holy Spirit wanted his confession of faith to be part of the eternal gospel message. To hear the name of Peter is equivalent to hearing once more the voice of Simon who confesses Jesus' messiahship and divine Sonship, an act that must be imitated by anyone who intends to enter into the great family of God, which is the Church.

For this reason, none of the arguments against Peter's assumption of earthly headship of the Church can be thought valid against his being considered symbolic of all genuine Christians. In fact, this latter view sees Peter as equal to those of whom he is but the symbol here. The man Peter is unimportant, because the assembly of Christ cannot be founded on the basis of a single individual alone. But *it is based upon him and all like him* insofar as this divine truth confessed make them what they are: the living stone out of which the new spiritual house is to be built. (1 Pt. 2:4) Should it surprise some that the Church should be founded upon men in whom the implications of this great confession are fully and freely displayed, then Jesus' words could be paraphrased in another way: "The basis of the Church I found, Peter, will be your type of people, i.e. believers who confess what you just said."

- f. This interpretation has the advantage of uniting all the best elements of the other interpretations:
 - (1) Since God is the Rock of Israel, then Peter, by his acceptance of God's revelations, becomes intellectually one with God by sharing with Him, despite his own humanity, that truth which he now confessed.
 - (2) If Christ is the Rock-foundation of the Temple of God, then

Peter by his admission of Jesus' true identity and mission, becomes, by that act, the same kind of material out of which that Temple is to be built—from the laying of its foundation to the glorious completion of every part. (1 Co. 3:11; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pt. 2:4-8)

- (3) If the truth of Peter's confession is the Rock-foundation, then Peter, by virtue of his conviction, identifies himself with that truth, which, in the final analysis, Christ Jesus had taught him. Peter's union with the truth, or the truth in Peter, had made him the Rock he was. Because he had built upon the rock (cf. Mt. 7:24f), his construction partook of the same solid, durable character as the rock of Christ's word and work he had now confessed. *He had become the truth he believed.*
- g. Whether this is the only proper interpretation of the phrase in question or not, it is none the less true that Jesus Christ has no Church at all, except that group of believers in all centuries in whom this confession Peter made is real. This view sees no one as truly part of Christ's Church who is not thoroughly what Peter was that day, when, despite adverse public opinion about the Christ, he staunchly stood firm for his bold, good confession.
- h. While it is certain that the Church began on Pentecost, the Church nevertheless became a live possibility only when a human being recognized Jesus' real identity and committed himself to it personally and publicly. This is why Peter is the first foundation stone. Jesus could begin to build His Church or assembly (*ekklesia*) once one human being—in this case, Peter—had correctly analyzed and accepted His true identity. However immature and failing Peter's faith may have been, it was a definite beginning point from which Jesus could begin. You cannot build a pack of wolves until you have at least a pair of wolves, nor can you build a church ("assembly") until you have some believers to assemble either. But one is a beginning, the foundation of what follows. Carver (*Self-interpretation of Jesus*, 109f) says it well:

There is buoyant rapture in His reply that we can appreciate only if we think of this as marking the realization in Peter of what He has all these years been seeking to develop in men. What He missed so sadly in the soliloquy

(Mt. 11:20-30, i.e. "No one knows the Son except the Father" HEF) He finds now in this man. Here, at last, is one man in whose experience He has become the Christ, the Son of God. . . . What He has achieved in Simon, He can accomplish in any other man, in all men. . . . Jesus has come to remake humanity, in the individual. Now He has an example. He has succeeded. . . . God's revelation which has become Simon's conviction is His opportunity for starting afresh in His program. He has some material now that He can use . . .

- i. Collateral support for this interpretation comes from Jesus' own personal teaching style. He habitually began from a concrete situation to illustrate an abstract truth. (Cf. Lk. 13:1-5; Mt. 18:1-4) To exalt the truth of His teaching, He presented Himself as "the Way, the Truth and the Life." (Jn. 14:6) When He needed to reveal difficult truth, His imagination produced suggestive parables based upon concrete objects or events. (Mt. 13:1-53) The urgent need to repent in the light of limited opportunity and immanent doom is pictured by a sterile fig tree granted one more year of care. (Lk. 13:6-9) Similarly, it would be natural for Jesus, desiring to teach the necessity of confessing the faith by anyone who would enter God's Kingdom, to speak of its first confessor, Simon "Rock," as symbolic of the rock foundation of the Church.
- j. Within the larger cultural context of Jesus' contemporaries, His symbolism used here was not a novelty incomprehensible to His hearers. Isaiah (51:1f) had exalted Abraham and Sarah as "the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were digged." The prophet's argument is this: in the same sense in which a "rock" apparently sterile, can be rendered fertile by God's blessing, so Abraham and Sarah, ancestors of the people of Israel, are symbols of what God can do. So, it was not unheard of in Hebrew literature to refer even to men as "the rock," in harmony with the immediate intention of the Biblical writer himself. (We must not create false parallelisms here, however, between Abraham "the rock" and Simon "the Rock," which would miss the point of both Isaiah's and Jesus' words. All that is affirmed here is the existence, in Hebrew literature, of similar—although not identical—references to men as rock and symbolic of some truth to be taught.)

2. Weaknesses of the view taken here:

- a. If Peter is really symbol of every Christian, then the Church (in the sense of "the congregation of the Christians") is both the foundation and what is founded thereupon. We have, thus, a confusion in figures.

Answer: If the word "Church" be taken, not in its connotative sense ("The Christians taken together as a body"), but in its denotative sense ("assembly, convocation, congregation"), the problem disappears. Thus, according to this view, Jesus is saying, "Upon such Christians as you, Peter, I will base my assembly."

- b. Does not this view, which sees Peter as merely the first stone (*Pétros*) of the same material as the rock construction (*pétra*) for which there would be many "living stones" (*lithoi zôntes*), commit the same error rejected in the view that sees Christ as the *pétra*? In fact, use is made here of texts (e.g. 1 Pt. 2:5) which mix distinct Greek words: *pétra*, *lithoi*. If such use were wrong in the one hypothesis, is it not also in the other? *Answer:* No, in rejecting the Christ = *pétra* view, we rejected only variant Greek words as they were by that view applied to Christ to prove Him to be the foundation stone, because its proponents laid great stress on the *pétros-pétra* distinction, without, at the same time, recognizing similar distinctions in words thought to sustain their hypothesis.

What is to be gained if this latter hypothesis be accepted?

1. If Peter, in his capacity as a confessing believer, really represents the "rock," then we are better able to grasp the ideal Jesus sets before us: *divine truth must be incarnated in human personality*.
 - a. In that glorious moment Peter had shown himself to be all that Christ had come to earth to create: a believer, a man who knew to whom he must go for leadership back to God and who sincerely trusted that Guide. Although he was but one Rock (*Pétros*), he was of the right material (*pétra*) to serve as a proper basis for the great congregation (*ekklesia*) to be established.
 - b. Even though Peter did not always live consistently with his confession, however, because the truth was truly in him and he in the truth, he was able to become that useful servant of the Lord that we witness in the New Testament.
 - c. The heart-searching question for the reader, then, is: "Are we

too 'Rock,' that is, persons in whom the truth God revealed in Jesus is truly incarnate? Or does it remain a dead letter on our lips?"

2. If Peter here (Mt. 16:18) and the other Apostles and Prophets elsewhere (Eph. 2:20f) can serve as foundation for the Church of living God, it should cease to shock anyone that God depends upon men for the carrying out of His plan for the foundation, growth and progress of His Church, His Kingdom in the world. (Cf. Psalms 8:2; Mt. 21:14-17; 11:25f; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; 2 Cor. 12:7-10)
 - a. What a glorious truth: the great God of heaven, absolutely independent of everything and everyone, sought a basis in human beings to accomplish His purpose to conquer evil and bless humanity!
 - b. And, although the Church is composed of men who are new creatures, redeemed, full of the Spirit, they are still MEN IN WHOM THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST IS A LIVING REALITY!

I will build my church. What is meant by *church* in this very first mention in the Gospels, will be amplified in the Epistles. Nevertheless, several characteristics of this new creation lie on the surface:

1. Its futurity: **I will build.** The new community of believers in Jesus Christ was yet to be inaugurated. Although Jesus had already set in motion a grass-roots movement in His popular ministry, He was not beguiled by His own popularity. He knew that the crisis of the cross and the demands of discipleship would thin out the well-wishers and the hangers-on. The Church must be born at the cross: without that sacrifice there could be no forgiveness, no Gospel and no Church, so, until Jesus had conquered sin and death, He could not build His Church. Whereas the same terms of salvation apply to men of any continent or time-period, i.e. faith in and obedience to whatever God requires of each, nevertheless, the fruition of God's plans revealed in the new Israel through the proclamation of redemption in Christ Jesus was yet future.

Consequently, rather than search the Old Testament for the source of the Church's life, as this is to be expressed in what she confesses and by her formal structure, we must look to the (then yet future) birth of Jesus' Church on Pentecost (Ac. 2) and the expressions of its life and practice that follow that date.

2. Its ownership: **My Church.** This fact is notoriously forgotten in congregational squabbles and in many theological circles, where both the doctrine and practice that the Lord desires goes unexpressed and is bypassed in favor of decisions based upon "church

traditions, convenience, local acceptability, unacknowledged power structures, fears and perhaps also unhistorical exegesis of Scripture." (Scott Bartchy)

While His personal ownership of the Church-Kingdom would not necessarily exclude national Israel, the fact that Jesus sees that a distinctive congregation is essential, i.e. separate from, and even opposed to, the nominal descendants of Abraham, suggests that these latter will have rejected the God-given Messiah and His Kingdom. Its futurity and its distinctive ownership combine to affirm that the concept Jesus has in mind did not then exist in the form of national Israel, and that He is dissatisfied with that nation as such. For the thinking disciple who follows this idea to its logical conclusion, Jesus must mean that, if any in national Israel are to be part of His movement, they must do so upon His terms which, incidentally, had already begun to stir up the determined opposition of almost every religio-political power block in Judaism! Rather than rejuvenate the elements already available in standard Judaism, He intends to form a new people of God destined to take the place of those who rejected Him.

3. Its sense of community: **Church**. It is to be an *ekklesia*: an assembly, reunion or gathering, summoned together, away from the public at large, for the purposes of Christ.

Since Church (*ekklesia*) means "assembly or congregation" we may ask: does Jesus have in mind "the congregation of the Lord," as this expression connotes the "whole nation of Israel, especially when gathered together for religious purposes"? (Cf. the LXX version of Dt. 31:30; Jdg. 20:2; 1 Sam. 17:47; 1 Kg. 8:14; Dt. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; Acts 7:38) If so, He means *ekklesia* in the sense of "the New Israel of God." (cf. Gal. 6:16)

Such a convocation, by virtue of its purpose and character, intentionally condemns all divisive attitudes, however they are expressed: as full-grown schisms or by individual sulking.

For further notes on the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom of God, see the Special Study after Mt. 13:53: "The Kingdom of God." There it is argued that the Kingdom is the effective reign of God in all of its expressions. The Church, therefore, is to be distinguished only as that congregation of Christian believers who have willingly submitted to the King's good government. The Church, as a concrete movement, expresses the intention of God's

Kingdom, and is in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is active in and through the Church. Nevertheless, the Church is not the only expression of God's Kingdom by which the universe is governed, even if, for Jesus' purpose in our text, it is the most significant, tangible manifestation of God's rule among men. This explains why Jesus can promise Peter "the keys of the kingdom" immediately following this announced determination to build His "Church," since Jesus knows that His Church, rightly understood, submits to God's Kingdom. The obedience to the terms of salvation preached by Peter instantly submits the believer to the rule of God (Kingdom) and makes him an integral part of the congregation (*ekklesia*), or Church of Christ.

I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (. . . *kai pūlai hādou ou katischūsousin autês*) To what does "it" refer? **It** (*autês*) is feminine, so refers directly to "church" (*ekklesia*), also feminine.

Hades is the realm of the dead, or death itself. In the Old Testament, as also in intertestamental Jewish literature, the expression **gates of Hades** is a common figure for the dwelling of the dead. (Cf. Isa. 38:10; Ps. 9:13 = LXX 9:14; 107:18 = LXX 106:18; Job 38:17; cf. Wisdom 16:13; 3 Macc. 5:51. See also Ps. 49:14f = LXX 48:15f; Hos. 13:14; Ps. 16:10 = LXX 15:10) The origin of the figure and its connotative flavor is explained variously.

The gates of oriental cities were the place where the judges held their deliberations, in which justice was done, and from which, naturally, the city's warriors poured to carry out the counsels of the city's elders. Sometimes plots were organized and conspiracies planned there. It was at the gate of Samaria that Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah decided their ill-fated raid upon Ramoth Gilead. (1 Kg. 22:10-12) The city gate also served as city court to resolve local questions, because the city's elders sat there. (Ruth 4:1-11; Ps. 127:5; Jer. 1:15; 14:2)

While these explanations are interesting, it is far more probable that Jesus intends *gates of Hades* in its idiomatic completeness, without reference to all the usual functions of city gates in the oriental world. The picture involved in *gates of Hades*,—if indeed Jesus intended any mental image, is that of a city called *Hades*, the place of disembodied spirits, within whose *gates* one is imprisoned by death. Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 70) suggests that "the plural 'gates' may perhaps be explained by the fact that originally it was thought

that many gates, one after the other (as in modern prisons), closed the entrance to Hades," through all of which one must pass to enter and from which there could be no return. If this plural, *gates*, intends only to reinforce the figure (cfr. Arndt-Gingrich, 16, on *Hades*), then it indicates the monstrous power of death within whose walls the Church of Christ would be locked, but could not be held, because those gates would be thrown ajar by the power of the Risen Christ. It is in this sense that **the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church**, a fact that has worked out historically in various ways:

1. The personal death of Jesus Christ in no way hindered His plan to establish His Church or come in His Kingdom as planned. (Cf. 16:18, 28) Rather, unless He submitted to death to bring them into being, there would have been no Church, no Kingdom of God on earth. His resurrection, predicted figuratively under the sign of Jonah (16:4) and literally (16:21), guaranteed that all that Death could do would not be strong enough (*ou katischūsousin*) to thwart the Church's being established. This truth is plainly echoed in Ac. 2:24, 31. (Cf. 2 Ti. 1:10)

This affirmation is definite preparation for the confrontation with the disciples on the question of the necessity of Jesus' going to Jerusalem. (16:21ff) Although they would imagine that His death would seal the doom of all hope of victory, He has already assured them here that death would have no power to hinder the glorious fulfillment of everything He planned for the Church's realization. He would come forth victorious from the tomb, thus guaranteeing the triumph of the cause of righteousness. Their fears were unfounded.

2. Despite the death of His followers, the loss of each single member to death would not mean the death of the Church. Even if Jesus be not speaking directly of our suffering death, but rather of His own death, yet the fact that He would crash the gates of death in a victorious break-through guarantees the perpetual victory of His people. This is the minor interpretation, because it depends for its accomplishment upon the personal victory of the Lord over death, therefore His struggle with death is the more directly appropriate interpretation.

In a very real sense, the Church was as much in Hades as was Christ Himself. In fact, had He not conquered death, there would have been no Church. Metaphorically, then, we may say that the Church was "born out of death," a fact surprisingly recalled in His later discourse: "the way to life is through death." (Mt. 16:24-28)

3. While this passage, as we have seen, does not explicitly reveal a war between two kingdoms, i.e. that of Jesus Christ against Satan's reign of death (Heb. 2:14), in which the Church would sweep in conquest, nevertheless the result is still the same! The kingdom of death cannot at any time hold out against the power of the Church to break its bonds and come forth.

Some see this mention of Hades (death, grave) as a metonymy for Satan's reign of death (cf. Heb. 2:14; Lk. 22:53; Jn. 8:44); hence, stands for all the conspiracies of the powers of evil combined: demons, Satan, and death. Accordingly, all these monstrous powers of wickedness and death would be brought to bear against the Church, without, however, succeeding in strangling or destroying it. (Ac. 4:24-31; Jn. 12:31; 16:33; Ro. 16:20; Rev. 2:10f; 1 Co. 15:54-57)

How COULD *the gates of Hades* withstand Jesus and the Church, when the resurrected Lord Himself has the keys to the gates?! (Rev. 1:17f) No, Jesus assures the disciples that His Church was not merely designed to last for awhile, like some school of thought or an ethical influence or a religious manifestation, but would continue beyond the grave and on into eternity!

16:19 **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** Before entering into a detailed discussion of the terms involved, it is well to remember our decision as to whether Jesus is carrying forward a supposed rhetorical figure or not. If so, then this verse must be interpreted in the light of that figure, but if not, then the terms used here will be interpreted in light of their usual sense and in context with the general subject under discussion. Because we failed to see the necessity to superimpose upon this text a rhetorical picture not explicitly stated in Jesus' words (see reasons at 16:18), we shall follow the latter course.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE AUTHORITY CONFERRED?

The expressions, **keys of the kingdom** and **binding and loosing**, taken together in so close a context, are probably to be understood in the rabbinical sense of "the right to teach authoritatively the truths of the Kingdom of God." It may have been by two steps that the rabbis appropriated for their ministry the glorious concept of

the keys of the kingdom:

1. It may refer to the office of royal steward. A key literally serves to open and lock doors. So the power of the keys consisted in providing (or excluding) access to and care of the royal chambers, and in the decision who was or was not to be received into the king's service. Keys, then, are a symbol of superintendence. Thus, authority and privilege are involved in the consignment of the keys, although not an authority or privilege independent of direct responsibility to the king himself. In fact, he who receives the power of the keys is not the king, but the trusted steward, or servant, of the king, since the keys continue to belong to the king to whom the steward is finally responsible. (Cf. Isa. 22:22; God is the real king of Israel; Rev. 3:7; 9:1; 20:1ff)
2. By a splendid metaphor the rabbis (scribes) could refer to the responsibility of opening the royal chambers of God's truth as possession of **the keys of the kingdom**. In this sense, as stewards of God's truth, they were to be responsible for permitting popular access into God's Kingdom, as proven by Jesus' attitude toward the theologians (scribes, rabbis) who misused their exalted position. (Lk. 11:52; Mt. 23:13 = *kleiete*, from *kleis*, a key))

That Jesus' disciples could become scribes is implicit in Mt. 13:52 and explicit in 23:34. That they would be stewards of the mysteries of God, is noted in Lk. 12:41ff. (Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1, 2) So, the power of **the keys** and **binding and loosing** may be but two forms of the same promise in the sense that *keys* would then be general teaching authority, while **binding and loosing** would be the specific sphere of its application. With Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 73ff) we should notice that the verbs . . .

. . . *binding and loosing* are two terms of rabbinic usage that assume opposite meanings according as they are applied to a "prohibition" or to an "obligation." In the case of the prohibition, one "binds" when he prohibits someone to do something . . . , while he "looses" by lifting the prohibition, permitting what had heretofore been prohibited . . . In the case of the obligation, one "binds" by establishing something as an obligation, but one "looses" when he eliminates this obligation . . . The verb "to loose" can also acquire the sense of "to pardon," i.e. to "loose" the guilt from the individual.

Consequently, consigning the keys to Peter is paramount to assigning

him the responsibility for admission to, or exclusion from, the Kingdom-Church. **Bindind and loosing**, accordingly, refer to the task of expressing authoritatively those terms of salvation and damnation which would permit men to enter the Kingdom, or else be forever excluded therefrom.

THE AGENT UPON WHOM THE RESPONSIBILITY IS CONFERRED

I will give unto thee means to Peter. No reading of the text can ignore the singular: "I will give to you (singular: *dôso soî*) . . . whatever you bind (*hò eân dâses*).” The promise of *the keys* is not made to the Apostles, either by name or taken as a group *per se*.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Since it is assumed that there is a degree of officialness in this granting power to Peter, it must also be remembered that the nature of the "office" must be judged by its historical exemplification in the life of the man to whom it was intrusted. But the nature of Peter's "office," as this is recorded in Acts, mirrors that of a major prophet whereby God made His will known through this authorized, qualified spokesman. Then, having revealed God's message, he had to submit to it personally and urge others to communicate it. Since God raised up none to occupy his specific function to reveal new truth or determine Christian orthodoxy and conduct, then the only "office" left is that which now faithfully communicates "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," i.e. those who share the message in evangelizing and teaching.

Before rejecting the authority conferred upon Peter as referring to judicial, administrative and legislative powers, since it appears to make Peter rule the Church and establish the laws of pardon (cf. Foster, *Middle Period*, 237), it must be remembered that Christ never consigns responsibility to men without also providing the power necessary for its proper completion. So, if we admit that Christ knew that Peter would faithfully deliver the decrees of heaven as these were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is the real administrator and legislator operating through Peter. Why fear such power when it is the Lord who not only decides to give it, who also decides to whom to promise it, but who also will govern its expression when He does confer it? Merely because we fear abuse of power, thanks to the myriads of illustrations available in Church history

alone, does this justify our hesitation to let Jesus confer it upon Peter, especially if the Lord Himself is going to be the One pulling the strings? Key-bearing authority is no different from normal prophetic authority, as fearful as that responsibility is! Has it suddenly become impossible to trust the Spirit of Jesus to be able to control the exercise of key-bearing authority wielded by the fisherman-Apostle? Even in the later history of Peter, when he once got out of line in his personal practice, the Holy Spirit at work in Paul was present to correct his temporary aberration. (Gal. 2) Modern fear to concede *the keys of the kingdom* to Peter is an over-reaction to Roman Catholic argument which misuses Peter. But since the Lord established no such hierarchy or series of successors as the Roman clergy demands, why prohibit the Lord Himself from recognizing the rock-like quality of His Apostle and conferring upon him this honor? And then judge Peter's ministry in retrospect: did he abuse what Christ here conferred upon him? Did he act the part of a pope? History has forever absolved him of that accusation! Had the Roman Church never abused this passage to exalt Peter to supreme authority over all other Christians, applying this text to what it was never intended to touch, no other meaning would have been sought for it. The fact that Jesus established Peter as a specially honored instrument for the first proclamation of the Gospel to the world, did not hinder Him from commissioning Paul. Perhaps we would worry less about the uniqueness of Peter's commission, if we remembered Paul's. (Study Ac. 9:15f; 14:27; 22:13ff; 26:15-18)

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Regardless of whether the tenses involved here be considered a future perfect passive ("What you bind on earth **SHALL HAVE** (already) **BEEN BOUND** in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **SHALL HAVE** (already) **BEEN LOOSED** in heaven"), or as a simple periphrastic future passive (as rendered in the common text), it is implied that Peter is to have such a very close relationship with God that he would know what God required or permitted. The resultant pronouncements of Peter will be precisely what God intends that he say. This is no esoteric, mysterious promise completely unconnected with everything that lies right on the surface of Jesus' ministry and of the history of the early Church. In fact, during Jesus' ministry, Peter had already been receiving precise and clear revelations of God's will openly expressed in all that Jesus said. (Jn. 17:14) In fact, it was on the basis of these revelations that Peter made his confession (16:17). Later, Jesus would

promise His Spirit to empower the disciples to remember His entire message and to make revelations of future events (Jn. 14:26; 16:13), so that they could preach and set down in print for all future ages precisely that Gospel and doctrine that God *bound or loosed in heaven*.

So, if the power of *the keys*, understood as the right to teach authoritatively the truths of the Kingdom of God, be no less than the inspiration of the Spirit who would cause Peter to reveal precisely what God willed, then we would expect other passages to confirm this. Instead of confirming only Peter, other disciples are included in the same general work and empowered by the same supernatural provision. Peter's unique opportunity or privilege is left intact, but others are added.

1. The authority to *bind and loose* is further modified by its being conferred also upon the Church. Although Mt. 18:18 is correctly analyzed as spoken directly to the Apostles personally present, conceptually, however, the emphasis is upon Christian cooperation within the congregation to settle difficult problems between believers and to correct sinners. Moreover, the major subject of the chapter is personal, not official, relation among the Apostles. Still, it is the assembly (*ekklesia*) which *binds and looses*.

Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 77) argues the illegitimacy of reference to Mt. 18:18 if used to weaken the fact that the keys were conferred upon Peter, since, contextually, the two texts (i.e. 16:18 and 18:18) refer to different situations. The former, rightly noticed by Salvoni, refers to Peter's unique mission to open the Kingdom of Heaven to men by indicating to them what was necessary to enter it. The latter refers, rather, to church discipline by teaching how to act in the case of a sinner within the group (*ekklesia*). He also argues correctly that the *binding and loosing* have different functions in the two texts: in 16:18 Peter is to indicate what is obligatory or not for the believers, whereas in 18:18 the text deals with sins of the individual sinner to *bind upon*, or *loose from* him. While these distinctions are essentially correct, Salvoni fails to see that both texts represent one total function, that of teacher and the decision about what is to be thought and done about a given problem, be it entrance into the Kingdom or that of an unrepentant sinner. To the Church is confirmed this authoritative function.

2. See comment on Jn. 20:21. (Objections to the papal position, at 16:18, II, A, 2) Other disciples were present to hear the precious promise: "Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Cf. Lu. 24:33-49) From this it appears that, whereas Peter, because of his forthright confession, was privileged to be God's first spokesman to reveal God's great truth about salvation in Jesus Christ, others too were to participate in this general work.
3. Paul's treatment of prophetic gifts assumes that others than Peter or the Apostles were so gifted as to assume an authoritative teaching role in the Church. (1 Co. 14:3f, 24f; Eph. 2:20; 4:7, 11)
4. Neither Peter nor the other Apostles were called to be innovative theologians, creatively inventing new theologies to which God must set His stamp of approval. Rather, they are called to be witnesses of what God had revealed through Jesus the Christ. (Cf. Jn. 15:26f; 16:13-15 where not even the Holy Spirit was to be innovative.)

Thus, the inspiration needed to *bind and loose* was promised, not to Peter alone, but also to other disciples as well.

But, to this view it may be objected that Peter is left with no uniqueness worthy of Jesus' declarations that here clearly single him out for special responsibilities, if not also honors. In answer let it be affirmed that this promise, like any other prophecy of future realities, must be interpreted in the light of its undoubted fulfilment. Of this prediction we have the fullest historical illustration in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. This prophecy was fulfilled exclusively and completely when Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, carried out his unique function by being the first to express those terms whereby both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10) would be forever admitted or eternally excluded from God's Kingdom. In so doing, he announced God's Word on earth. Because of its normative character and finality, there is no further need for new Peters to arise to use these or other keys. The Kingdom, once opened to mankind by Peter's proclamation or forever left inaccessible to those that reject his message, needs no further opening or closing. This is why we must dissent from Plummer (*Matthew*, 231) who decides that we may not assume "that what Peter decides for the visible Church is binding on the Church invisible; or that what he decides for the visible Church of his day holds good for ever, however much the conditions may change . . ." No, it is because of Peter's inspiration that we must

assume the definitive authority of his words, especially when he is absolutely the first Christian Apostle to enunciate the perfect universality of Christianity, the first Apostle to announce Christ's Lordship, the first Apostle to tell both Jews and Gentiles how to be saved on God's terms. Why NOT listen to Peter? What possible change of conditions could justify ignoring Peter today? It is Peter who, after describing Christian maturity, assures us: "Be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall. So there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pt. 1:5-12)

Since *binding and loosing* appear in a context concerning the use of the *keys to the Kingdom of heaven*, then, as Salvoni (*Da Pietro al papato*, 73ff) has it, these expressions . . .

. . . must refer to something that is necessary or is not necessary for someone who desires to enter it. In the book of Acts which serves as a commentary on Christ's prophecy, it turns out that it is Peter himself who once and for all rendered baptism obligatory for entrance into the Church ("bound"), while he dispensed with the obligation of circumcision ("loosed").

Peter's great mission during the early days of the Church, even before Paul's great contribution, was to establish the Church on a solid, international basis by liberating Christianity from the Jewish religion. (Ac. 15:7ff) By establishing the Christian plan of salvation ("binding") and never once requiring any Jewish rite ("loosing"), he carried out his mission prophesied here. Although Peter definitely occupied a leading position in the life of the early Church during the period of its almost exclusively Jewish character, he was instrumental in giving divine sanction to the evangelization of the Gentiles. Thus, he actually laid the groundwork for acceptance of Paul's brilliant ministry to the Gentiles. Although Paul's apostleship was truly independent of Peter's authority, his specific mission was prepared for by Peter. Salvoni (*ibid.*) notes:

In place of the "doctors of the law" (scribes) who with their doctrine hindered others from accepting Jesus as Son of God and from thus entering into the Kingdom of heaven, Jesus places the confessing Peter, so that, with his faith just demonstrated, he might open the Kingdom of heaven to anyone desiring to enter it. Not the Scribes, but the Apostles (here represented by Peter) will be the new heralds of the Word of God, the new prophets of Christianity.

The key-holding responsibility of Peter does not at all militate against his being considered symbolic of the foundation of the Church, as suggested in v. 18. Rather, to whom ELSE should Jesus more appropriately consign such an important responsibility as that of bearer of the keys, than to the first tested believer in whom the experience of Jesus as the Anointed Son of God is a real conviction? No amount of fear of falling into the Roman Catholic error can justify denying to Peter what Jesus really gives to him and recognizes in him! In fact, it is notorious how far the Roman Catholic Church, while formally glorifying Peter, so effectually ignores Peter's teaching, in favor of her own dogmas! This is why the modern Christian must not balk at owning Peter as the retainer of the keys. Rather, we must be more truly Petrine than any Catholic ever thought about! We must accept the terms he revealed for entrance into (or exclusion from) God's Kingdom, or miss it entirely! (Acts 2:36-40; 3:26; 4:12; 5:29-32; 10:42-48; 11:17f, etc.)

Should it be argued that any view that sees Peter as intended to be symbolic of the rock foundation of the Church, even as symbolic of every believer, proves too much, because, if that interpretation were carried forward into this verse (19), then, to every truly Petrine believer is consigned *the keys* and the authority of *binding and loosing*. To this it may be answered:

1. Sure, why not? After all, every believer in whom the conviction is real that made Peter the rock he was, really does use only the Petrine keys to open or close the Kingdom to anyone he contacts with the Gospel. And, since the "Petrine keys" are really those of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 10:20; Jn. 20:21-23; Lk. 24:46-49; Ac. 2:1-4, 14; 4:8; 5:3, 4, 9; 10:19), all of the Spirit-filled Christians of the first century joyfully proclaimed the Gospel which the Spirit inspired Peter, first of all, to proclaim to the Jews on Pentecost and to the Gentiles later. Only those Christians who faithfully adhere to and faithfully proclaim THIS Gospel may consider themselves to be such. In any case, we are "key-holders" only in a secondary sense. (Cf. Ac. 4:31)
2. On the other hand, NO Christian, other than Peter, received that unique, first privilege of proclaiming the terms of pardon to representatives of the entire world. He had been first to confess Jesus on the basis of a matured conviction and when specifically tested. Why should he not also be the first to proclaim Jesus? In this view, the only proper primacy left to Peter is not ecclesiastical primacy, but merely chronological.

HOW IS THIS AUTHORITY EXPRESSED?

Carver (*JSBE*, article "Power of the Keys," 1794f) well outlines the hierarchical mentality and structural concern apparently innate in human beings, that is apparent in Church history's various answers to this important question:

1. The power of the keys was conferred to Peter alone.
2. The power committed to Peter was also conferred upon the other apostles, including Paul, discharged by them, and descended to no others.
3. The power was conferred on Peter officially and on his official successors.
4. The power was conferred on Peter officially and the other apostles officially, and to such as hold their place in the church.
5. The power belongs to Peter as representative of the church, and so to the church also is committed the same power, to be exercised in the following manner:
 - a. By the officials of the church alone.
 - b. By the officials of the church and those to whom they commit it.
 - c. By all priests and persons allowed to represent the church *de facto*.
 - d. By the church in its councils, or other formal and official decisions.
 - e. By the church in a less formal way than through formal, conciliar decisions.
 - f. By all members of the church as representing it without specific commission.
6. The power belongs to the Christian as such, and so the power is imposed upon, or offered to, all Christians.

This penchant for structuring a "chain of command" is neither sinful nor merely human, because God has also organized the heavenly order (Col. 1:16; Rev. 4, 5; 1 Pt. 3:22; cf. Psa. 89:5-7) and structured human authority for man's benefit. (Ro. 13:1-7; Psal. 8) However, like most human mistakes, it is possible for man to take a good thing to an extreme, and want to establish precise limits where God established very few. We feel that we must be certain beyond the limits of reasonable certainty. For man, it is not sufficient that Christ should be Head over His Church, ruling it by His Word (1) authentically revealed once for all by a few authorized spokesmen, i.e. Apostles and

Prophets, and (2) faithfully taught by a multitude of evangelists and pastoring teachers, and (3) obediently observed by everyone until Christ comes. Nor is a simple, congregational government judged by some to be adequate with its local rulers, the superintendents (bishops = elders = pastors). Man must have an iron-clad chain of command, with authorized officials and specific commissions to speak only after conference in formal councils, that decide either on matters that God said nothing about, or is thought to be unclear in what He did teach. Nothing is to be left up to chance, if man must be mathematically certain that he is right. For these reasons, the above-listed plethora of possible applications of this our text is quite seriously offered by serious, sincere students of church polity! Unfortunately, most of these expressions sadly miss the primary emphasis of Jesus which is light-years' distance from establishing an official hierarchy so foreign to His fundamental approach to government. His emphasis is not upon uniqueness of power and privilege, but upon usefulness of duty and responsibility; not upon office, but upon function. It just does not seem to occur to us that power and privilege and office are of absolutely no use to the Lord, where the usefulness of duty, responsibility and function are absent. And for those theorists who hold that one can have both in equal measure and in equilibrium, let it be answered that nowhere in sacred Scripture is it recorded that Jesus conferred the papacy or its equivalent upon anyone. If there are no predecessors, there can be no successors! Besides, Jesus knows that He can expect usefulness, responsibility and function without instituting power structures and privileged offices to get them.

How is this authority expressed? Once Peter's function had been completed, the Kingdom was open to all men. Other Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers lead men into the Kingdom by the gate opened by Peter. All of them together, Peter included, then busy themselves in the maturing the Christians and the committing the Word, now revealed, to faithful men who shall be capable of teaching others also. (2 Ti. 2:2; Ro. 15:14)

If Peter is really symbolic of every Christian, then the exercise of this power belongs to the Christians as such. The Christian must be all that Peter was in the moment of his confession, the kind of rock of which all "living stones" built into the temple of God must be before God inserts them into His construction. Thus, the words addressed exclusively to Peter are to be thought of as addressed to him in his symbolic character as the first typical Christian. So, Peter has no special prerogative to hold the keys other than the chronological

priority to use them. Carver (*ISBE*, 1794f) concludes that

The words were spoken to him only as the first who gave expression to that conception and experience on the basis of which Jesus commits the keys of the kingdom to any believer in him as the Christ of God. . . . The holder of the keys is any man with that experience that called forth from Jesus the assurance that Peter should have the keys. Such a man will be in fellowship and co-operation with like men, in a church, and the Spirit of Jesus will be present in them, so that their decisions and their testimony will be His as well as theirs. There is a corporate, or church, agency, therefore, and the man who would ignore that lacks the experience or the Spirit needful for the use of the keys. Yet the church is never to overshadow or exclude the individual responsibility and authority.

In the early Church are revealing examples of the non-official, but true, communication of the divine truth on the part of common Christians who, despite their unofficial position and perhaps also lack of miraculous credentials or special mandates, went everywhere preaching the word" (Ac. 8:4), starting churches wherever they went, opening the kingdom of God even to other races. (Ac. 11:19-26) They accepted the priesthood of all believers (1 Pt. 2:4, 5, 9; Heb. 13:15f; Rev. 1:5b, 6), utilizing their individual gifts for the common good. (Eph. 4:7; 1 Pt. 4:10, 11; 1 Co. 12:6, 7; Ro. 12:3-8)

WHAT IS THE SCOPE OR RANGE OF THIS POWER?

1. This power confers no political authority over the kingdoms of the world. It is no mistaken antithesis that notices that Jesus said, not "keys of the kingdom of the world," but "keys of the kingdom of heaven." The reign of God is not "of this world," (Jn. 18:36), although very much in the world.
2. The power of the *keys* and *binding and loosing* is spiritual power to be used for making men godly. It is therefore a redemptive, sanctifying influence. No corruption of this influence, either by its abuse or omission, can lay claim to Christ's support. Because it is also a liberating influence, all unauthorized binding of human opinions, conclusions and traditions upon the disciples is unjustified. Therefore, when any disciple, without divine authorization confirmed by prophetic credentials, attempts to invoke the

power of the keys by binding their conclusions upon others, he has usurped the Lord's authority and must be rebuked.

3. It follows that the power of the *keys* and *binding and loosing*, understood in the sense of teaching what God has revealed, is essential to liberate the Kingdom from evil men who try to take possession of it for their own purposes. Spiritual men must be equipped to exclude these usurpers.
4. The power of the *keys* and *binding and loosing* necessarily involves the teaching of the condition of entrance into the Kingdom and proper conduct in it. But this cannot mean the "authoritative" invention of "necessary" applications of divine principles where God has not revealed these. It must mean merely the appropriate and thorough proclamation of the revelations given once and for all by the Apostles and Prophets. The divine commission of the Church is always to "teach them to observe (1) all that (2) I have (3) commanded (4) you." (Mt. 28:20)

6. Secrecy Required (16:20)

16:20 Then charged he the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ. The reason for this extraordinary strict order (cf. Lk. 9:21) is woven into the fabric of the context in which it was given:

1. It was given at a time when the word "Christ" or "Messiah" would provide the spark to ignite the powder-keg, exploding in a bloody national uprising that would attempt to throw off Roman supremacy, end Roman occupation of Palestine, restore Jewish independence, attempt world dominion under a Jewish Messianic King, and bring in an era of unprecedented prosperity for Israel. This was the religio-political platform of the Galilean party of Zealots ready to revolt instantly, were they to discover a convincingly viable Messiah. All the genuine, spiritual aims of Jesus' Kingdom would be totally ignored in the ensuing confusion. Six months earlier, tumultuous disciples had reacted to Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude by exclaiming, "This is indeed the Prophet to come into the world!" and He barely staved off their ambition to take Him by force to make Him their kind of king. (Jn. 6:14, 15) Another perhaps more impelling reason for this prohibition is that those very disciples themselves as yet so badly understood what they themselves had confessed in calling Him the Christ of God. Just

how badly they misunderstood is vividly portrayed in the successive conversation. (16:21ff) Very likely they still considered their confession to be perfectly compatible with bloody revolution, national glory, hierarchical attainment and material prosperity. Without direct inspiration to override their own prejudices,—which, because of this prohibition, we may assume He would not provide,—what could they say publicly to explain what it meant to believe Him to be the Christ? Total silence on this subject is the only solution.

Further, what could be sufficient to correct the mistaken impressions that would be left in people's minds by (presumably) off-key preaching by the as yet uninspired Apostles? Once a sack of feathers has been emptied into the wind, regathering them would be impossible. Jesus, therefore, is saving Himself and the Twelve the work of having to undo what wrong-headed zeal and bad timing would have caused.

3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 24) rightly sees that the popular, however misdirected, enthusiasm of the masses ready to crown Jesus and sweep Him into power, is a real temptation to Him. Satan's wilderness suggestion to avoid the cross and still enjoy world power without suffering, is by no means dead. In whatever form, by whomever proposed, the opportunity to be the kind of Christ men wanted is the same sordid seduction.
4. Another significant motive for silence combines the previous ones. If the as yet imperfectly understood confession of His Messiahship were caught up as a revolutionary motto, it is conceivable that, were Jesus to be cast in the role of a political revolutionary, even the cross could become a sociological impossibility. Why should a national hero be executed by the Jews? But, since He never intended to be this kind of Christ, if events should precipitate to such a level, He would then have to change His course radically. And, since His sacrificial death to complete the expiation of our sins lay at the center of His mission, He must ruthlessly eliminate anything that would threaten to block this determination. (Cf. on 16:22f; 17:9; Mk. 9:30f)

The Triumphal Entry enthusiasm is no objection here, because at that point there was no time left for the development of revolutionary fervor before His crucifixion. In fact, the hot-bloods from Galilee, present at Jerusalem during the national feast, were only a portion of the total assemblage. Also, Jesus' Apostles

held their silence, not proclaiming Him openly as the Christ. Jesus Himself, too, did everything possible to make Himself available to His enemies to permit them to carry out their determination to destroy Him.

5. Only the resurrection and glorification of Christ could place the true nature of His Christhood in its proper perspective.

What a commentary of men and events: God has taken 1500 years to teach Israel what He meant by this word "Christ" and yet the Jews had practically totally misunderstood the word! But before we proudly condemn, we must ask what He is trying to instruct us concerning the words "Church," "Kingdom," "cross-bearing," and "self-denial" and many other concepts!

B. THE WAY OF THE CROSS (16:21-28)

1. The Revelation of Jesus' Approaching Death and Victory (16:21)

16:21 This is no less a test of the Apostles' commitment to Jesus than was the question asked earlier, for this declaration is but the trial by fire through which their commitment to Him must pass. It is one thing to confess sincerely that Jesus is the Christ, Savior and Lord. It is quite another thing to accept everything He says though it collides with our own understanding. The Apostles had brilliantly passed the first test. Would they do as well when their confession (as they understood it) was clearly contradicted by Him who was the object of their trust?

The crucifixion part of Christianity is unique, because, in His self-revelation, Jesus had the unique choice to reveal Himself first as the glorious Messiah of God, or first as the suffering, crucified Messiah. If He revealed the former first, His disciples would not be prepared for His death, but if He revealed Himself as born to die, they would not believe in His glory because of their inherited prejudices. His reserve regarding His sufferings had been maintained out of regard for their weakness. He waited, therefore, until Peter's confession confirmed their relative readiness for this news. A critical reason for Jesus' beginning now with a frank elaboration of His destiny to suffer is the three-way tension between the escalation of the opposition's plotting against His life, the disciples' natural nervousness about it, and Jesus' determination not to defend Himself. Foster (*Middle*

Period, 240) sees that

To keep the apostles in ignorance of the fact that He did not intend to defend Himself would place the apostles at a great disadvantage. It would be harder to control them and to keep them from meeting violence with violence.

From that time began Jesus to show his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things. . . There had been ominous, distant thunder warnings before, that hinted of the approaching storm that would finally burst on Calvary. (Cf. Lk. 2:34f; Jn. 1:29 "the Lamb of God" to be slain? 2:19-22; 3:14; Mt. 9:15; 12:40; Jn. 6:51-57) Now, however, all allusion has been dropped, and the horrifying facts are bared in all their shocking realism: **He began to show** (*deiknúein* = "to show, indicate, make known, reveal, explain") "He said this plainly." (Mk. 8:32) Until this crucial moment Jesus had been steadily building the disciples' faith in Him, gradually divulging His heavenly mission so that they could sustain the shock which the cross must inevitably produce on their emotions. Now, however, they must learn the unexpected, unwelcome, even incomprehensible lesson that the concept of His death did not contradict the reality of His divinity and Lordship. *Jesus began* and He kept up the lessons (Mt. 17:22f and parallels; 20:17-19 and par.; Lk. 17:25), because they must learn to live with the Divine Will, however temporarily uncomfortable it might be. Bruce (*Training*, 169) underlines the somber significance of going *to Jerusalem*:

Yes! there the tragedy must be enacted: that was the fitting scene for the stupendous events that were about to take place. It was dramatically proper that the Son of Man die in that "holy," unholy city, which had earned a most unevitable notoriety as the murderess of the prophets, the stoner of them whom God sent unto her. "It cannot be"—it were incongruous—"that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." (Lk. 13:33) It was due also to the dignity of Jesus, and to the design of His death, that He should suffer there. Not in an obscure corner or in an obscure way must He die, but in the most public place, and in a formal, judicial manner. He must be lifted up in view of the whole Jewish nation, so that all might see Him whom they had pierced, and by whose stripes also they might yet be healed. The "Lamb of God" must be slain in the place where all the legal sacrifices were offered.

He must go and suffer (*deí apeltheîn kai pollà patheîn*) This

prediction is not simply the astute recognition of an unavoidable disaster, but the announcement of a personal purpose in harmony with the decree of God (*deſpatheîn*). This is best felt by comparing 16:21 with Jn. 3:14f; Lk. 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5?; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; Mt. 26:54; Ac. 3:21; 17:3; 1 Co. 15:25. His predicted suffering and death is entirely voluntary, for who, in his right mind and intending to live out his normal life, would deliberately walk into a trap set for him, out of which he knew there could be no exit except through the tomb? Foster (*Middle Period*, 240f) justly concludes that

Jesus was seeking to cause His disciples to recognize the divine compulsion and plan behind His perplexing refusal to defend Himself and behind His approaching death. The enemies of Christ could not destroy Him. They would not be able to bring about His death unless it was God's will that He go into their midst and suffer torture and death at their hands.

Although Jesus does not even name the cross directly here, it was clearly in His mind. In fact, His discourse which immediately follows shows how vividly the cross stood out in His thinking. Even if He must mention the reality of His death without indicating the method by which it would be accomplished, He has already given the disciples more in this first announcement than they can tolerate.

Jesus began to show his disciples that His enemies were already plotting the very course He now details for His men. (Cf. Jn. 5:18; Mt. 12:14 and par.) Whereas their plotting was yet somewhat nebulous in contrast with their final success in Jerusalem, Jesus' precision marks Him as a Prophet of the first order. In fact, whereas any astute political observer could predict that, given the collision course on which Jesus was heading, the Jewish clergy would very probably do Him in, no one but God could foresee Jesus' victory over them by His triumph over death.

Elders, chief priests and scribes: whether or not this expression is the normal technical designation for the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin, it practically includes its every member: the men of reputation, representative constituents from various cities of Israel, the priestly caste and the theologians. There is no cushioning of the shock in the discovery that the most famous, most influential, most highly respected men in Israel would unite to inflict this suffering on their Master! Now it becomes even clearer why He had ordered His men to "let them alone" (Mt. 15:14). He had no intention to

save face before that religious establishment, because it stood at cross purposes with God's plans. *Elders*: the Hebrew Flusser (*Jesus*, 159) is plainly mistaken to plead that the Jewish Sanhedrin was not responsible for Jesus' condemnation, since, according to his own apologetic purpose to exculpate the best men of Judaism, these *elders* must be only "the elders of the Temple," hence, merely Sadducees. Matthew, however, (26:3, 47) terms them "elders of the people," not merely "of the Temple." The whole Sanhedrin would be involved. (Mt. 26:59; Mk. 14:55; 15:1 *hólon tò sunédrión*; Lk. 22:66 "the assembly of the elders of the people" *tò presbutérion toû laou*) While it is unnecessary to perpetuate and unChristian to perpetrate further hatred of Jewish people, it is also unjust to exonerate those actually responsible for this judicial murder. To accomplish this latter, Flusser must discount the historical references to the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction. To what state had so glorious a nation fallen when her wisest, holiest, most learned men should become the prime movers and responsible agents in the contemptuous execution of the One Hebrew whom God had chosen, qualified and sent to bless her in turning everyone away from his sins! (Ac. 3:26)

He must be raised up the third day. What sort of King is He who so confidently promises His own resurrection shortly after His yet future death? Although Jesus' students missed this victory note. Matthew's readers have the unexcelled advantage of being able to ponder this question, and they must decide about it. *The third day* (= "after three days," Mk. 8:31) This expression, coming shortly after the repeated sign of Jonah (16:4) and reminiscent of the more elaborate expression of that sign (12:39), is but its literal interpretation given by the Lord Himself. If Jesus intends to arise literally *on the third day*, then the figurative language of the earlier prediction which had seemed so precise, must be interpreted in light of His explanation. (See notes on 12:40.) If Jesus must remain in the tomb literally "three days and three nights" (= 72 hours), then His resurrection would occur on the fourth day, a hypothesis nowhere affirmed in Scripture. He said: *on the third day*, not "on the fourth day."

This prophecy is a perfect illustration of divine foreknowledge. In fact, every single person who was to play a role in this drama did so with full liberty and responsibility, yet their moves were foreseen in surprisingly accurate detail.

2. Peter rebukes Jesus (16:22)

16:22 **And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall never be unto thee.** Peter's words are stated here in about as good an English paraphrase as is possible for *hileós soi, kúrie*, literally: "(God) be merciful to you, Lord." This scene is so true to life, so human, so much like all of us! We are repelled by death, especially that of our closest friend. So Peter, too, could not understand how our glorious Lord must also crumble in the dust of death. The Twelve could admit that the common lot of mortals might include martyrdom, even on crosses. But "the difficulty of the twelve was probably not that the servant should be no better than the Master, but that the Master should be no better than the servant"! (Bruce, *Training*, 176) **Peter took him** aside (*proslabómenos*, Mk. 8:32), evidently intending to make the rebuke relatively private. But his shock reflected that of the others. (Mk. 8:33, "But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter," as if they too stood stunned by His incredible prophecy, agreed with Peter and so needed to hear the correction administered to Peter.) They must have reasoned: "Our Master no better than a common criminal? Unthinkable! But what of the Kingdom, if Jesus should die? What will happen to us, His closest followers? Of what sort of kingdom is He, then, a king, if He must die to establish it?" These burning questions form the backdrop of Jesus' answers and teaching that follows. (vv. 23-28)

The stunned Apostle probably hoped to head off that kind of talk as soon as possible, because Jesus' message came through with a clarity far too painful. (Mk. 8:32) It must have seemed to Peter that such negative talk would defeat the Messianic cause he had just confessed, and render impossible the realization of the Church to be established. But his psychological reaction is astonishingly similar to that of Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1ff). That Pharisee, after having honestly admitted that Jesus was "a teacher come from God, since no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him," turned immediately to arguing with the Lord whether the new birth from above could be a real possibility or not!

The abruptness of Peter's reaction indicates that this is the first time that any of the Twelve had really understood anything about Jesus' destined suffering. Allusions had preceded this, which the disciples had apparently cast into the limbo of incomprehension or had interpreted in some figurative sense, e.g. Jesus' influence would

suffer some sort of temporary eclipse only to shine forth in far more glorious strength thereafter. Now, however, His words are impossible to take in any way but literally.

Because they focused only upon the concept of the suffering Messiah, the men missed the promised hope of His resurrection. And despite the stern correction Jesus handed them on this occasion, a correction they could understand intellectually, they could still not bring themselves emotionally to accept its truth—even after the resurrection had occurred and its reality witnessed to them. (Mt. 28:17; Lk. 24:8-11, 41; Mk. 16:11, 13f; Jn. 20:9) Obviously, they had stopped listening as He told of the compelling necessity of His death. Emotionally, they may have never even heard the rest. Death was such a shock that resurrection lost all its glory for them. Yet, His prediction of a resurrection was not futile, even though it probably did not fully register in their mind, since, like the sign of Jonah given to the Pharisees (Mt. 12:39; 16:4), when the resurrection actually occurred, it became the means of strengthening their faith as they recognized, however tardy, that Jesus had actually described it many times before it took place. (Cf. Jn. 2:22)

Another psychologically true note is sounded by Peter's officiousness: could anyone really suppose that the true Son of God, God's Anointed, could do or say something that deserved rebuke? Could anyone who is really thinking admit that such a Leader needs leading? But Peter's impulsive, well-meant reproof arises in a mind that is perfectly normal in its not being able to see the real, moral contrariety between the rebuke and the confession. His own prejudice blocked out his ability to sense this contradiction. Because these disciples had no conception of the necessity of the Messiah's suffering, the more firmly they trusted Him to be the Messiah, the more confused they became when told He must be executed. Rather than trust His promise of resurrection, they could only hope that His extremely negative view of the situation would prove baseless. And so they sin by supposing themselves to have a clearer conception of Jesus' duty than He Himself does! They have no intention to tempt Him to prefer safety to righteousness, duty and truth; they merely suppose that He wrongly understands what they have decided must be true. Herein is written the danger of supposing that our love for the cause of Christ may permit our well-meaning concern to overstep the limits that our discipleship imposes upon us, and to tell our Lord what He can say or do. In this frame of mind, Peter is the forerunner of all Christians who assume that they know anything better than Jesus

and may safely presume to tell Him so. All of Peter's sincere love for Jesus and his devotion to His cause, all his joy flowing out of his past confession, all his happiness born of Jesus' commendation, are insufficient to justify this bold protest against the program of God revealed by His Son! Every believer must be open to correct his own understanding and be able to grow past the limitedness of his beginning conceptions, however rightly stated may have been the terminology in which it was originally expressed.

3. Jesus rebukes Peter (16:23)

16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. What a crushing blow this must have been to the fisherman-Apostle who probably expected to be commended for his love and concerned loyalty, even as he had earlier been recognized for his faith and grasp of his Master's revelation! And yet, too much was riding with the outcome of this confrontation to permit Jesus to treat Peter in any other way. Jesus may not have expected the disciples instantly to fathom the absolutely essential nature of His death, but He did not intend for them to object either!

Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block unto me. Peter is a Satanic trap to Him in a dual sense:

1. Peter's selfish concern for the supremacy of his views as to what the Kingdom of God must be and how it must be brought about is the same subjective self-interest that makes Satan the devil that he is. He had no concern to promote God's interests; only his own.
2. Because this is true, Peter's misdirected affection is nothing but Satan's subtle attempt to sway Jesus from His divinely appointed purpose. Bruce (*Training*, 174) is right on the mark to link with Satan's character this advice to sacrifice duty to self-interest:

That advice was substantially this: "Save thyself at any rate; sacrifice . . . the cause of God to personal convenience." An advice truly Satanic in principle and tendency! For the whole aim of Satanic policy is to get self-interest recognized as the chief end of man. Satan's temptations aim at nothing worse than this. Satan is called the Prince of this world, because self-interest rules the world; he is called the accuser of the brethren, because he

does not believe that even the sons of God have any higher motive. He is a skeptic, and his skepticism consists in the determined, scornful unbelief in the reality of any chief end other than that of personal advantage.

Any counsel to prudence, any hope of by-passing the cross which stood at the focal center of God's foreordained plan, is nothing short of being the subtlest whisper of Satan who is making excellent use of perfectly natural, well-meant concern for Jesus' safety and earthly success. "None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends who care more for our comfort than for our character." (Bruce)

Jesus shows His true humanity at a critical point: He is temptable! Peter really has become *a stumbling-block* in Jesus' path. He needed no persuasion to avoid the cross that any true human being would instinctively dread. Rather, He needed to be encouraged to endure it! This is why He responds so drastically to the temptation: He refuses to temporize with sin. In so doing, He sternly exemplifies His own doctrine. (Mt. 5:29, 30)

Thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. Disciples of all epochs must learn once and for all that no man may confess Jesus to be Messiah and Son of God and still permit himself the luxury of disagreeing with whatever in His message does not suit his taste, views or hopes. This very disagreement with the Lord of all earth and heaven is nothing less than *minding the things of men* at the expense of the will, purposes, plans and methods of God.

Whereas it was God who had revealed to Peter the great confession, it is this-worldly self-preservation that prompted his present protest. God planned the death of Christ for man's sins, but the popular concepts dreamed of a political, earthly Messiah ruling in kingly splendor. God intended a reign voluntarily embraced in humble, submissive faith, but men clamored for a triumphalistic, fascistic domination that forced compliance to the architects' brand of king and ruthlessly crushed all opposition. God desired to offer men mercy through the voluntary self-sacrifice of His Son; men's scheme had no place in it for mercy; only self-glorying, self-justifying, self-satisfied self-righteousness. And even if the Apostles who had already given up much for Jesus did not now intend to be selfish, they nevertheless suffered from the short-sightedness of their small view. They were grossly hampered because they preferred their human point of observation as final, rather than God's. Jesus, on the other hand,

could see the victory of God's counsels, as well as the self-defeating, self-destructive end of theirs.

4. The Sermon on the Cost of Our Salvation (16:24-28)

16:24 **Then Jesus said unto his disciples**, but before launching this ultimatum, He "called to him the multitude with his disciples" to hear it. (Cf. Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23) The presence of the crowd argues that His desire for privacy was only partially realized during the trip north. The Evangelists' silence about the motive for the presence of the crowd does not permit us to determine whether Jesus was actively engaged in any public ministry, although this is doubtful, because of the nearness of the final crisis and the deep need of the disciples for further training. The crowds, however, had probably heard of His fame (cf. Mt. 4:23-25) and here too "He could not be hid." (cf. Mk. 7:24) However little or much they knew of Him, they too must hear this hard-hitting, down-to-earth challenge. In short, He was promising "blood, sweat and tears" for every one of His servants. No cost would be too great, no sacrifice too dear for His sake. Only realistic individuals who have taken a long, hard look at discipleship need apply for membership in God's Kingdom! The loyalty and devotion that He had required of His Apostles during their first evangelistic tour (Mt. 10:38f) is also required of everyone without exception. (Mk. 8:34; Lk. 14:27; 17:33) The extreme demands Jesus makes here are not for the heroic few who would live exceptional lives somehow untrammelled with the harrying problems of normal existence, or for spiritual giants capable of reaching this hallowed ground. They are for housewives, businessmen, coal miners, truck drivers, lawyers, sailors, students and pensioners, living and working in the commonest daily experiences. This is not the rare spiritual discipline for so-called "religious orders of super-Christians," but the only means of saving ANYONE!

If any man would come after me (*El tis thélei . . .*) The service of Christ is to be freely accepted as an autonomous choice of the will and because we want to. (*thélei*) There is no external constraint, just the impelling power of a new affection. It is easy to submit to the subtle pressure of family, friends, the congregation or the preacher. But one cannot become a Christian unless he *wants* to more than anything else. Not even God compromises our liberty to refuse. (See notes on 13:9.) But this does not mean that willingness to deny self and bear a cross are matters of indifference, because the terms of