

Signs Given, Signs Requested
Matthew 15:29—16:

Throughout Jesus' public ministry, beginning with His baptism, signs have been given to show the Jewish nation that Jesus was indeed their Messiah. When He was baptized the Father announced vocally that Jesus was His Son while the crowd could see the Holy Spirit alighting upon Jesus. John also announced that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Even before He was born and at His birth there were prophetic utterances about who Jesus was (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31—33; 2:11).

All the signs of healing, casting out demons and miracles were done to get Israel's attention and cause them to believe that He was the Christ. Those who took the time to compare Old Testament prophecies with what Jesus was doing and saying would be able to immediately see that He was the One for whom they had been waiting. Many who took the time to honestly evaluate what Jesus said and did believed on Him.

More healings (verses 15:29—31)

After His encounter with the Canaanite woman, Jesus returned from the area of Tyre back to the Sea of Galilee. Once again a large crowd came to him along with many who were lame, crippled, blind, mute plus many others. Those who were brought to Jesus for healing were all healed. It's interesting that everyone is able to get healed and no one was turned away because of a lack of faith. As was pointed out in a previous lesson, these people were healed completely (Acts 3:16). The lame were able to walk immediately, the blind were able to interpret the things they were now seeing for the very first time. Even those missing limbs were given a new body part (Matthew 15:31; see Matthew 18:8). People who "heal" in the name of the Lord today are unable to do these things. If they were truly sent by God to heal they should be able to heal all and heal completely. The reason they can't is because the spiritual gift of faith healing has been done away with. God still can and does do miraculous healings but He does not do it through faith healers (1 Corinthians 13:8—9). Those who claim to be faith healers today are either very misguided or are working for Satan.

This is why it is so important to properly divide Scripture. Give to Israel what is Israel's and give to the Body what belongs to the Body. It's not, as many people claim, cutting up Scripture and throwing parts of it away but it is a system that separates truth from truth. When the two programs are mixed, confusion ensues. These healings were specifically done to announce the King (Jesus) and the soon-to-come Kingdom. They were all signs pointing directly to Jesus saying He was Israel's Messiah. Those going into the Kingdom will enter perfect in heart and in body just as the Old Testament promised (Isaiah 35:1—6). What better way to point the Jewish nation to their Messiah?

Feeding of the 4,000 (verses 15:32—38)

It probably wasn't too far in the past that Jesus feed the 5,000 and now we have the corresponding account of Him feeding 4,000 men, not including women and children. The first feeding occurred on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee while this one appears to be on the south side. The people were so engrossed with Jesus that they had been following Him for the past three days. Any food they brought was now gone because they probably never thought they would be away from home for so long. They were so spellbound with Jesus and His miracles and teaching that they couldn't seem to get enough. They were hungry for the hope that He presented to them and were eager to soak it all up.

As in the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus confronts the Disciples with the task of feeding the large crowd of people. Their reaction to feeding them was almost the same as the first time, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

To us it seems like an obvious time for Jesus to perform a miracle like He did with the feeding of the 5,000. If He could take almost nothing and feed a great multitude once, why couldn't He do it again? But the Disciples missed the connection and also missed the obvious connection (at least to us) of God feeding Israel in the wilderness. They did not really associate Jesus having the ability to supply them with a meal with God supplying Israel in the wilderness. Even while Israel wandered for 40 years and had the supply of water, manna and quail most did not believe in Him (Psalm 78:9—33). They were to relate all these things that happened to them in the wilderness to their children and to their children's children so that they would not forget what God did for them (Psalm 78:5—6). They were to do this so that when Jesus came to them, they would believe that He was sent from God. However, just as Israel did not believe God in the wilderness, they did not believe Christ when He came.

The events that happened in the wilderness will be paralleled in the Tribulation. Those who believe and flee Jerusalem at the *abomination of desolation* will be protected and fed by God. He will set a table before them in the presence of their enemies (Psalm 23:5; 78:19). He will take them to safety on eagle's wings (Exodus 19:4; Revelation 12:14). On a physical level, Israel understood that God supplied them with bread (manna) in the wilderness but they tripped over the idea that God was presenting them with spiritual bread in the person of Jesus Christ (John 6:29—40). By these teachings Jesus was showing them that He is all they need for their every necessity. He was able to heal them and feed them and could give them what they needed for eternal life if they would only believe on Him. Just as Israel was denied entrance into the Promised Land because of unbelief, they will not be able to enter the Millennial Kingdom (Hebrews 3:19).

Request for more signs (Verses 16:1—4)

Once again, after Jesus had done thousands of signs through healings and miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and asked for Him to show them a sign from heaven. Jesus, however, knew they didn't come to Him with a legitimate request. They came, instead, to test Jesus, and as Mark 8:11 states, they were arguing with Him. Their arguing could only mean they were disagreeing with Him about what He was saying and probably told Him to prove what He was saying (that He was the Son of God) by doing some miracle. Obviously, Jesus had already done thousands of miracles and they were well aware of that, but they were approaching Him as unbelieving antagonists. No matter what Jesus would say or do they would argue with Him and deny that His power to heal came from God.

Earlier, in Matthew 12:38, some scribes and Pharisees came and asked Jesus for a sign. The only sign He gave them was the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the earth for three days so shall the Son of Man. When Jonah preached, the Gentile nation of Nineveh repented and believed, to the condemnation of Israel who will not believe even when the Son of God is in their midst. Israel's heart is colder than that of the Gentiles. The only thing on the minds of the Pharisees is the death of Jesus to help them retain their power over the people (John 11:47—48).

Jesus answers back to the Pharisees that they are able to discern the physical signs of the sky but are unable to discern Scriptural signs that point to the times. If they knew Scripture they would know that the end of the age is quickly approaching. Since they were living in the last days of prophecy (Acts 2:14—17) they should also know that the Messiah would be right there. They missed all that because they were not looking at things spiritually but only from a physical standpoint. They couldn't discern things that were truly of God because they were of their father the Devil (John 8:44).

How many churches today have the appearance of spirituality but are in fact serving Satan? The appearance of spirituality is maintained with lavish settings and empty rites and symbolism, The Pharisees had long, flowing, decorative robes and liked to call attention to themselves with their lengthy, pious prayers. They went through elaborate hand and vessel washings to show people how righteous they were. They were nothing more than whitewashed tombs, pretty on the outside but rotten on the inside (Matthew 23). This is the unfortunate condition of many of today's churches. They are displaying themselves with the facade of spirituality but inwardly they are decayed corpses, only able to please Satan.

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