

Matthew Chapter 16

Verses 1-12: The unbelieving leaders came seeking a “sign from heaven,” that is, an outward miraculous manifestation. Notice that miracles alone never save anyone. They serve only to authenticate and call attention to the message, which must be believed in order for salvation to be experienced in the soul.

Instead of another miracle, Jesus points them to the “signs of the times, eschatologically related to the sky and His second coming. The “sign of the prophet Jonah” relates to His resurrection (see 12:38-40; John 2:18-22). This sign gives hope to the believer but is an indication of judgment for the unbeliever, who will be judged by the risen Christ at His second coming.

Matthew 16:1 "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven."

“A sign from heaven”: This time Jesus rebuked them for being so concerned with heavenly signs that they could not even interpret the signs of the times all around them. Then He referred them to the same sign He gave them before, the sign of the prophet Jonah (verse 4; 12:39).

These Pharisees and Sadducees were always trying to trap Jesus. They would not have believed, regardless of how great the sign from heaven.

Matthew 16:2 "He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, [It will be] fair weather: for the sky is red."

As primitive as their method of predicting the weather was, their ability to discern spiritual matters was worse. They had the long promised and long-awaited Messiah in the midst and refused to acknowledge Him.

Matthew 16:3 "And in the morning, [It will be] foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O [ye] hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not [discern] the signs of the times?"

Jesus was saying to them, signs that you can see with your eyes, you understand; but the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures in your Bible, you do not understand. Throughout the Old Testament, God warned of the signs of the times.

At least 37 times in the Old Testament, there was prophecy about the coming of Jesus, and these learned men of the Old Testament did not even realize that the fulfillment was standing before them. These Pharisees and Sadducees could even predict the weather by the physical signs in the sky; but had no spiritual discernment at all.

Matthew 16:4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them, and departed."

Jesus upbraided them for not understanding their own Scriptures better. Abraham, their physical forefather, accepted on faith. This was not good enough for them; they had to see the act with their very own eyes. Followers of Jesus must accept on faith.

Wicked people refuse to believe. Jesus called them wicked and adulterous. Wicked because of their unbelief; adulterous because they spiritually rejected Him (spiritual adultery).

The sign spoken of, that would be given, was Jesus' body lying three days in the earth and rising again, as Jonah spent three days in the whale's belly and was returned to the earth.

He knew that they would not receive or understand the message, so He (as He has commanded us to do when they will not believe), left them and went somewhere where they would receive the message.

Matthew 16:5 "And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread."

The account in these verses is also recorded (in Mark 8:13-21).

“And when his disciples were come to the other side”: That is, to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Mark says that he entered into a ship again, and departed to the other side. The conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees had been on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. They crossed from that side again to the east.

“Had forgotten to take bread” That is, had forgotten to lay in a sufficient supply. They had, it seems, not more than one loaf (Mark 8:14).

Matthew 16:6 "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

“The leaven of the Pharisee and of the Sadducees”: When Jesus warned of this dangerous influence, the disciples thought He was talking about bread. Again, He reminded them of the fact that the Lord provided plenty of bread, so they didn't need the bread the Pharisees were offering. How soon they forgot the miracles.

These disciples were thinking of their physical needs. Jesus was warning them about the sin (leaven), of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus was warning His disciples of the false doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. If you will, their spiritual blindness.

Matthew 16:7 "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, [It is] because we have taken no bread."

The thoughts of the disciples were so fixed upon their failure to supply bread that they thought the remark about leaven contained a rebuke. The Lord reminds them of his creative power, and how it has been put forth.

Usually, when our mind or reasoning gets involved, we leave the spiritual far behind.

Matthew 16:8 "[Which] when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?"

“Which when Jesus perceived”: Without hearing any of their debates, but by his omniscience; for he knew the doubts and unbelief, and anxious solicitude of their minds, as well as their private reasoning one with another:

“He said unto them, O ye of little faith”: A phrase used upon a like occasion, when he would dissuade his disciples from an anxious distressing care about a livelihood (Matthew 6:30).

“Why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?” Blaming one another for your negligence and forgetfulness in this matter; distressing your minds, as if you should be famished and starved, because ye have not brought a quantity of bread.

Matthew 16:9 "Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?"

“Do ye not understand”: Meaning either the sense of the advice he had now given; or rather his almighty power displayed in the two miracles of feeding five thousand at one time, and four thousand at another, with a very small quantity of provision.

“Neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?”: Have you forgot what was so lately done, namely, the feeding five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fishes, when ye took up, after all were filled and satisfied, no less than twelve baskets of fragments?

And can you, after this, distrust my power in the care of you? Have I fed so many with so small a quantity of food? And am I not able to feed twelve of you, though you have but one loaf? Why all these anxious thoughts and carnal reasoning?

Matthew 16:10 "Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?"

Have you forgot the other miracle done but a very little while ago, when I fed four thousand men, beside women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fishes; “and how many baskets ye took up?”

No less than seven large baskets; and am I not able to provide for you? Distress not yourselves about this matter; give no way to unbelief, which must argue great stupidity and insensibility.

Jesus was saying, have you forgotten so quickly about the miracle of the feeding of the multitude? Jesus could not believe that they still doubted for their physical food, when so great a miracle was performed twice. Don't you know they felt ashamed when they were reminded?

Matthew 16:11 "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake [it] not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?"

“How is it that ye do not understand”: That you should be so senseless and void of thought, after such instances, as to imagine, that I concerned myself about what bread you brought with you. One would think you could not but know, “that I spake it not to you concerning bread”, taken in a literal sense.

But must be thought to speak figuratively and mystically, and to have a higher sense and meaning, when I said to you, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees. How could you think that I had any regard to the leaven taken in a literal sense, the Pharisees and Sadducees approve or disapprove of?

Matthew 16:12 "Then understood they how that he bade [them] not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

“The doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees”: Here the leaven of the Pharisees is their “teaching.” In (Luke 12:1), it is their “hypocrisy.” The two things are inextricably linked. The most sinister influence of the Jewish leaders was a pragmatic doctrine that made room for hypocrisy.

They were too concerned with externals and ceremonies and the way things appeared, and not concerned enough with matters of the heart. Jesus rebuked them for their hypocrisy again and again.

Verses 13-17: (See Mark 8:27-33; Luke 9:19-21). “The coasts of Caesarea Philippi:” This was a town in the extreme northeast of Galilee, near the source of the Jordan. Verse 14 shows that public opinion placed our Lord on the highest human pedestal by identifying Him with one of the national heroes of the past, “John the Baptist.”

Herod himself was a victim of this particular superstition (see 14:2). From (21:15), we know that He was held in high esteem as a prophet by the people. “Thou art the Christ:” Simon Peter recognized and acknowledges openly the Lord’s deity. He may have been speaking for all the disciples.

Verse 20 suggests that it was a conviction they all now shared. Peter further used the Greek definite article “the” to designate that Jesus was “the Son of the Living God.”

Matthew 16:13 "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

“Caesarea Philippi” was a Greek town in the northernmost regions of Palestine (120 miles north of Jerusalem and 50 miles southwest of Damascus), situated in a beautiful location at the foot of Mount Hermon, and the headwaters of the Jordan River. It had been called Pnias, honoring the Greek god Pan.

Herod the Great built a marble temple there to Caesar Augustus. Herod’s son, Philip the tetrarch, further adorned the city and renamed it in honor of Caesar. To distinguish it from the city on the coast he identified it as “of Philip,” hence, Caesarea Philippi. This city is mentioned only twice in the New Testament, both passages relating Peter’s great confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-29).

The transfiguration of Christ probably took place on the nearby slopes of Mount Hermon (Matt. 17:1-13). The Greek name is preserved in the present Syrian town of nine thousand, named Baniyas.

This Caesarea Philippi was not the same as the Caesarea by the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus asked the disciples an interesting question. Many people, even today, are inquiring, who is this Jesus?

Now, as Mark says, whilst Christ and his disciples were in the way to these parts; and, as Luke, when he had been praying alone with them, he asked his disciples, saying, “whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”

The question is, what men in general, whether high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, under the notion they had of him as a mere man, said of him. Or since they took him to be but a man, what man they thought he was; and to this the answer is very appropriate.

Matthew 16:14 "And they said, Some [say that thou art] John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

You see, the interesting thing about Jesus then as now, was that He was a mystery; they could not figure Him out. They never denied that He did the miracles, and that He was a great teacher and prophet. We read where Herod believed He was John the Baptist, risen again after Herod beheaded him.

In Malachi, there was a promise of Elijah. Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:"

Matthew 16:15 "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?"

“He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am?” Without taking any further notice, or making any reflections on the different sentiments of men concerning him, he put this question to his disciples, and which is what he had chiefly in view, that he might have their sense of him.

They had believed in him, became his disciples, and were followers of him: but it was not enough to believe in him, they must confess him; both are necessary. Therefore, he does not say,

whom believe ye, “but whom say ye that I am?” He was saying. I know what the world thinks, but what do you ministers of mine think? Do you really know who I am?

Matthew 16:16 "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

“Living God”: An Old Testament name for Jehovah as contrasted with the dead, dumb idols (Jeremiah 10:8; 18:15; 1 Cor. 12:2).

When the expression “Son of God” is used concerning Christ, it delineates the relationship between the first two members of the Trinity. The Hebrew expression “Son of” implies one with the same nature as the father. In this sense, there is no real difference between “Son of God” and God the Son.” Both emphasize the deity of Christ and His unique relationship with the Father.

When Jesus identified God as His Father, implying that He was “the Son of God,” the Jews understood this as a claim to deity (John 5:18). When Peter identified Jesus as “the Son of the living God” (verse 16), it was the result of spiritual insight (verse 17).

As we become increasingly intimate with Christ, we should also become increasingly aware that Jesus is the Son of God.

This answer that Peter gave is the proper name of Jesus for His stay here on this earth. He (Peter), was saying, You are the Anointed One, the only Son, the Savior of the world, The Life Everlasting.

Jesus answered Thomas and told him that He (Jesus), is Life. He went so far as to say that no one comes to the Father, except by Him (Jesus). To be saved we must know who He is and believe He is our Salvation. (John 6:65)

Matthew 16:17 "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee”: Christ’s messianic claims had always been subtle allusions to Old Testament prophecies, combined with miraculous works that substantiated those claims. Never before had He explicitly taught Peter and the apostles the fullness of His identity.

God the Father had opened Peter’s eyes to the full significance of those claims, and revealed to him who Jesus really was. In other words, God had opened Peter’s heart to this deeper knowledge of Christ by faith. Peter was not merely expressing an academic opinion about the identity of Christ; this was a confession of Peter’s personal faith, made possible by a divinely-regenerated heart.

You see, fleshly man does not have any idea who Jesus is. The blessed of God (true believers), are the only ones who understand who Jesus really is. Unless God reveals to us in our spirit, we

will never truly understand who Jesus really is. This is why it is so important today to understand the person of Jesus.

Most false doctrines are very close to the truth. They are misled about the person of Jesus. False doctrines teach that He became God when He rose again; some even teach that He suffered in hell for us. None of these are true. We must carefully weigh teachings with the Word of God. It must line up with Scripture to be true. Beware of teachings that elevate man.

Matthew Chapter 16 Questions

1. What did the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus to show them?
2. What were they trying to do?
3. Would they believe, if He gave them what they asked?
4. What physical sign meant fair weather?
5. How many times in the Old Testament were they told about Jesus?
6. They could discern the physical, but could not discern what?
7. Who seeketh a sign?
8. What is the only sign that will be given?
9. Their forefather, Abraham, accepted on what?
10. Why did Jesus call them adulterous?
11. What are we told to do when people will not hear?
12. What did Jesus warn the disciples of, pertaining to the Pharisees and Sadducees?
13. What was Jesus really warning them of?
14. Usually when we start to reason with our minds, we leave what behind?
15. What miracles did Jesus bring to their remembrance?
16. Jesus is the _____ of _____.
17. It is impossible to please God without what?
18. It was not the leaven of bread, but what of the Pharisees Jesus warned them about?
19. How is the only way to understand a hidden message?

20. What question did Jesus ask the disciples at Caesarea Philippi about the people?
21. What do people ask today?
22. What four answers did they give?
23. What things have never been denied about Jesus?