

MARK

A Commentary for Bible Students



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them not to tell anyone (7:36) is corporate in nature. Though the crowd is described with typical “amazement” language (1:27–28; 2:12; 4:41; 5:15, 20, 42; 6:51), for a rare moment the reader is informed of what they actually said: “**He has done everything well. . . . He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak**” (7:37). This has a tenor of eschatological language as it seems to complete the prophecy of Isaiah 35:4–6.



WHAT OTHERS SAY

TOUCHING EARS

By preaching the Word today, the minister is symbolically touching human ears that they may be opened to the living Word by the mystery of grace.

—Ambrose

As a final word on the passage, there is a close parallel with a similar episode that appears in 8:22–26: the healing of a blind man. In both, Jesus took the men away from the crowd for the healing (7:30; 8:23). He touched both men on the affected areas

(7:33; 8:25). In both episodes, the people brought the men to Jesus (7:32; 8:22). Finally, His employment of spittle in healings is confined to these two healing stories.

ENDNOTES

1. Barnabas Lindars, “All Foods Clean: Thoughts on Jesus and the Law,” *Law and Religion*, ed. Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge, England: James Clarke Company, 1988), p. 65.

2. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 65.

3. The list is not exhaustive, for the New Testament contains several others (Gal. 5:19–21; Rom. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 6:9–10).

4. The term “evil thoughts” is closely linked with the verb “comes,” while the following nouns are in apposition to one another.

5. It should not be surprising to discover that Matthew, the most Jewish of the four Gospels, described the litany of evil much more in sync with the Ten Commandments: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder (6), adultery (7), sexual immorality(7), theft (8), false testimony (9), slander (9)” (Matt. 15:19).

6. The common Markan word “immediately” is found in many of the ancient copies of Mark.

SUPPER, SIGNS, AND SIGHT

Mark 8:1–21

1. FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND 8:1–10

The transitional phrase **during those days** (8:1) keeps the story moving forward while carefully connecting it temporally and locally with the previous events. The time indicators become much more precise the closer Jesus got to Jerusalem and the last week of His life. Regarding location, we find Jesus and His disciples remaining in the Gentile territory of the Decapolis (7:31). The feeding of the four thousand in the Gentile land is a direct parallel with the previous feeding of the five thousand in Galilee (6:31–44). Mark reports that **another large crowd gathered** (8:1). Moreover, this second feeding of the four thousand, taking place in Gentile territory, assured that the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed would be ethnically diverse.



CHART

PARALLELS BETWEEN MARK 6–7 AND MARK 8

Feeding Narratives	6:31–44	8:1–9
Boat Scene	6:45–56	8:10
Conflict with Pharisees	7:1–23	8:11–13
Discussion about Bread	7:24–30	8:14–21
Miracle Healing	7:31–36	8:22–26

These direct parallels in the blocks of material highlight the difficulty of Jesus' teaching ministry. The disciples were not merely intellectually deficient, nor did they simply need more information; they needed to be morally transformed. After each of the feeding miracles, the disciples failed to understand the significance of the bread (6:52; 8:14–21). Mark carefully repeated events—the feeding of the five thousand and feeding of the four thousand describe the disciples' *deafness* to the words of Jesus and their *blindness* to His miraculous deeds. Note carefully the miracles that occurred following each feeding: opening of the ears (7:31–37) and the healing of the blind man (8:22–26). No one will fully comprehend the person of Jesus unless first their deaf ears are opened and their blind eyes are healed. These events anticipate the work Jesus must do in the life of every disciple, then and now, before anyone can truly confess, **“You are the Christ”** (8:27–30).

SUPPER FOR THE CROWD

Following his normal practice, Mark provided the reader with insider information regarding Jesus' primary motivation behind the feeding miracle: He was responding to human need. The story begins with the note that **they** [the large crowd] **had nothing to eat** (8:1). Mark told much about the Christ by what moved Him to action. Jesus explained His motives to His disciples as He said, **“I have compassion for these people”** (8:2). The text implies that the crowd may have initially come with food, but their provisions had run out because they remained to hear His teaching beyond their original timetable. Moreover, Jesus says they demonstrated a desire to hear Him because **“some of them have come a long distance”** (8:3). This passage hints at a hunger that goes beyond the satisfaction derived from food (see also John 4:32–34).

The disciples responded to Jesus with words reminiscent of their previous feeding encounter (6:35–37): **“Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”** (8:4). **This remote place** refers not only to the place of Jesus' prior feedings (6:32), but it echoes of the time and place of God's provision of food in the Exodus event. Thus, the words of the disciples might well have come from the lips of

the complaining Israelites just before the Lord brought forth manna in the first wilderness experience (Exod. 16:1–5). Moreover, Mark employed a cognate of the word that is translated by the NIV as desert (see 1:3–4, 13, 35, 45). And it is here that we are to understand wilderness as a place of temptation. Thus, Mark proclaimed that what is about to transpire is a time of provision by Jesus and a place of proving by the people.

Jesus responded with exactly the same question He asked in the prior feeding narrative: **“How many loaves do you have?”** Surprisingly, the disciples seem to have had no recollection of a similar question to a similar need in a similar remote place. Yet they immediately knew that they had access to **seven** (8:5) loaves. As before (6:39), Jesus **told the crowd to sit down on the ground** (8:6), and His next actions are nearly identical to the previous feeding: He gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to distribute. Just as before, there were also **a few small fish as well** (8:7), for which He gave thanks and had the disciples distribute.

The people [once again] **ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over** (8:8). Scholars often find symbolic significance in the numbers recorded here: seven baskets left over as a sign of perfection and prefiguring the seven leaders of the Hellenistic church (Acts 6), or the four thousand men¹ present, which might represent² Gentiles gathered from the four corners of the world. Mark may have recorded numbers given to him through the traditional material passed on to him or by eyewitnesses.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MIRACLE

This passage incorporates several themes that Mark has been carrying along throughout the book. First is the denseness of the disciples. The disciples acted as if they had never witnessed the earlier feeding of the five thousand (6:35–44). Moreover, when Jesus asked the same question in the exact wording as before (6:38–8:5), they did not relate to the earlier conversation and miracle feeding. The disciples did not comprehend the Kingdom values outside their own worldview.

Second, Mark revealed that Jesus' compassion is not based on human response or human understanding. He satisfies the deepest needs of

people and relieves their suffering, with abundance. Third, the context of this miracle is in the non-Jewish territory of the Decapolis. Jesus was most certainly feeding a Gentile crowd with the same bounty as His previous five thousand Jewish diners. Fourth, in these two feeding narratives (6:30–44 and 8:1–10), Mark showed no surprise or rebuke on the part of Jesus toward His disciples. In the midst of their blindness, Jesus did not isolate them as a means of reprimand. Rather, He instructed them by the miraculous object lesson, a memory they would recall during the Last Supper. This leads to the fifth lesson. This second miracle of the loaves not only looks back to an earlier scene, but it anticipates the eucharistic meal where Jesus would again take bread and bless and break it before graciously giving it to His disciples (14:22).

2. THE PHARISEES DEMAND A SIGN 8:11–13

In this short but terse encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees, Mark wanted the reader to understand that blindness was not a weakness limited to the disciples alone. The Jewish religious leaders **came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven** (8:11). The NIV's translation of this passage may be just a bit tame. For the Pharisees were not *questioning* Jesus, but "disputing" (see RSV) or "arguing" (see NASB). Jesus' opponents were not *testing* Him to discover truth, but more appropriately were *tempting* Him (see Jesus' encounter with Satan 1:13). Finally they were not *asking* in any polite manner for the sign but "seeking" (see NASB), which takes on a severely negative connotation based on Jesus' response. R. T. France said it best: "They [the Pharisees] do not come for dialogue, nor do they expect any sign to be given; their aim is simply to discredit Jesus."²

So, what was it that the Pharisees required from Jesus? They asked for a **sign from heaven**. For a first-century Jew, a sign by its very definition had its origin in heaven (see John 3:2). Thus, they were not asking for just another sign; they had in mind a particular sign distinct from the self-revelatory acts of Jesus. They were demanding Jesus to show or to say something that would verify His messianic status and signal Israel's deliverance from her enemy, Rome. Further, this would only be confirmed when the Gentile

rulers who were polluting the land were cleansed from Israel. Jeffrey Gibson helpfully summarized that the sign from heaven they demanded was something that was "apocalyptic in tone, triumphalistic in character, and the embodiment of one of the 'mighty deeds of deliverance' that God had worked on Israel's behalf in rescuing it from slavery during its first exodus."³ The irony of the situation is that this request from the Pharisees came immediately following a miraculous event that dramatically equated the works of Jesus (feeding four thousand in the wilderness) with the provision and deliverance of Moses during that Exodus (manna and water in the wilderness). These Pharisees were indeed deaf and blind, and Jesus would not be intimidated to take a plan of action different from God's purposes.

Mark interjected two other issues that added emotion to the already charged exchange. The first is the narrator's comment that Jesus **sighed deeply** (8:12) at the demand of His opponents. Mark painted Jesus as a real person in every way. Physically, He was hungry (3:20) and tired (6:31). Emotionally, He demonstrated the whole spectrum of human feelings. **This generation** is the second term of interest that Jesus attributed twice to the Pharisees in verse 12.⁴ In Mark's gospel, miracles and parables have similar functions. For those with ears to hear, parables demonstrate the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11–12). For those with eyes to see, miracles demonstrate the power of the coming Kingdom. The reverse is just as true. Those without ears hear only parables, while those without eyes see only amazing acts. The ones without ears are considered "outsiders" (4:12), while the ones without eyes are referred to as "this adulterous and sinful generation" (8:38; see also 8:12; 9:19; 13:30).

KEY IDEAS

SIGNS IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND JOHN

The word "sign" was not used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke as it was in John.

In John, a sign (2:11; 4:54) was a divinely inspired event that pointed onlookers toward belief. In John, "miracle" does not occur.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, "miracle" was a wonder-working event that declared that the kingdom of God had come; a "sign" was seen negatively as a demand for proof of Jesus' identity (Mark 8:11–12; Matt. 12:38–40; Luke 11:29–32) beyond the evidence that God had already given.

At this Jesus **left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side** (8:13). It is difficult to determine if this verse is only transitional or a deliberate breaking of Jesus from the Pharisees. Though in English the phrase “left them” may appear neutral, in 12:12 and 14:50 Mark used the same words to describe a deliberate and permanent breaking of relationship. Mark might have wanted the reader to see these words as a clean and decisive break with the Pharisees and the “generation” they represent. From here on, Jesus invested in His disciples.

3. THE DISCIPLES' BLINDNESS 8:14-21

This passage stands at the end of the first half of Mark and may serve as a summary in describing the dullness of the disciples. The passage combines the literal theme of bread with the metaphorical theme of yeast, as it fully illuminates the disciples' blindness. Furthermore, Jesus seems to have been cautioning that the disciples' behavior borders on that of His most deceitful opponents. While the Pharisees faithlessly demanded a sign, the disciples did not seem any wiser, even though they personally participated in two feeding miracles.

The passage begins with a problem: **The disciples had forgotten to bring bread** (8:14). Being caught without proper provisions had happened two times previously, yet instead of trusting Jesus to multiply the one into many, they focused only on their meager holdings. The disciples had not only forgotten to restock their supply of bread, they had forgotten the feeding miracles. **“Be careful!” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod”** (8:15). The word **warned** in the Greek is in the imperfect tense, likely indicating either an ongoing dialogue between Jesus and His disciples or that what followed was a summary of a more lengthy discussion.⁵ The reference to **yeast** (leaven) is a familiar metaphor in the New Testament, usually referring to evil acts or intentions. Thus, Jesus may not have been warning about the ideological issues of the Pharisees and Herod, but warning them about the persons who fashioned a threat against the life of Jesus.

They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread” (8:16). The disciples seem not to have acknowledged

Jesus' warning. Jesus was quite aware that the disciples and He were talking at cross-purposes. His first rebuke was “Why are you talking about literal bread while I am discussing something quite different?” And the implication of the NIV's choice of **talking** is far too safe (8:17). Jesus may have been using the word to indicate that the root of their “deliberations” was unbelief.

A series of accusations follows: **“Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?”** (8:17). Then Jesus forced the disciples to respond to a succession of questions: **“When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven”** (8:19-20). These questions demanded the disciples to recall the most poignant parts of the two feeding narratives, primarily the parts of the miracles that they themselves participated in: the actual distribution of the food and the amazing leftover bounty. They should not have been able to forget the magnitude of the miracles, but as of yet, they only see them superficially.

Jesus' final words, though piercing, hinted at His hopefulness: **“Do you still not understand?”** (8:21). The NASB translates the word **still** as “not yet.” Though it appears as if Jesus had given up on the Pharisees' being changed, He had not lost hope in the disciples. The implication is that eventually they will “see” and will “understand.” As David Garland says, “Unlike the Pharisees, their problem is not that they refuse to see but that they *cannot* see until after Jesus' death and resurrection.”⁶

ENDNOTES

1. There is no indication in the Greek wording to assume this number four thousand refers only to the men present. That implication comes from Mark's earlier use of the word *andros*—male in the numeric reporting of the feeding of the five thousand (6:44).

2. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 311.

3. Jeffrey B. Gibson, “Jesus' Refusal to Produce a Sign (Mark 8:11-13),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (1990): 53.

4. The NIV, for the sake of readability, eliminates the second reference of the term. The NRSV has a more literal translation of the verse: "And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." Thus, Jesus' statement, as well as His demeanor, emphasized the moral inappropriateness of the question in its form: This generation . . . sign . . . sign . . . this generation.

5. Mark has placed summary statements at key junctures throughout the book.

6. David. E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), p. 312.

Part Two

Jesus on the Way to Jerusalem— Discipleship Training

Mark 8:22–10:52

This section is framed by the healing of two blind men: the unnamed man in 8:22–26 and blind Bartimaeus in 10:46–52. Besides these two miracles and the exorcism in 9:14–29, there are no other miracles in this middle section of Mark. The "wonder-working Jesus" of Act 1 becomes the instructor of servanthood in Act 2.

One additional feature of 8:22–26 is noteworthy. Jesus never directly discussed His own death in Act 1. It was hinted at with the plotting of the Pharisees and the Herodians in 3:6. But Jesus' suffering and death take center stage in His discipleship training. And this only exacerbates the disciples' blindness, for a dying Messiah was an oxymoron in their worldview.

INSIGHT INTO THE MESSIAH'S TASK

Mark 8:22–33

1. THE FIRST HEALING OF A BLIND MAN 8:22–26

The two healings of blind men (8:22–26; 10:46–52) serve as bookends on this entire section; Mark wanted the reader to interpret Jesus' teaching in light of these two healings. One should not overlook the similarities of this first healing with that of the deaf mute in 7:31–37. Both took place in non-Galilean locations; Jesus was requested to touch the men; He responded to the request; and He demanded secrecy following the healings. Even the following phrases are nearly identical: **some people brought . . . begged Jesus** ("begged him," 7:32) . . . **When he had spit** ("Then he spit," 7:33). The similarities in these two healings can also be seen in conjunction with the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5–6, which begins with the opening of the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf, work attributed to God in Psalm 146:8 and Isaiah 29:18. Thus, Mark's literary linking of these passages and his appeal to the Old Testament demonstrate a powerful witness for the person and work of Jesus.

This scene begins with Jesus and His disciples arriving in **Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him** (8:22). Bethsaida was a village outside of Galilee on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and was under the control of Philip, a son of Herod the Great. The expectation of the people was that Jesus could heal by merely touching the man, as He had done for others (1:41; 3:10; 5:27; 6:56; 7:33; 8:22; 10:13). Jesus **led him outside the village** (8:23), which

was Jesus' normal practice, for miracles that engendered faith often were performed in privacy. After spitting on the man's eyes and putting His hands on him, Jesus asked, "**Do you see anything?**" (8:23). His question to the man parallels His later question to the disciples in 8:29: "Who do you say I am?" What the blind man saw is to be viewed as a precursor of what the disciples confess about Jesus.

The man's response seems odd: "**I see people; they look like trees walking around**" (8:24). Obviously the man had not been born blind, since he knew the appearance of trees. But his vision was only partially restored. **Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes** (8:25). It was then that **his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly** (8:25). Note the vivid description of the healing in rapid-fire succession. First, **his eyes were opened** is an intensified form of the verb "to see." Second, **his sight was restored** implies full restoration of health and sight (see 3:5; 9:12). Finally, **he saw everything clearly** leaves no doubt that this cure is complete. The last Greek verb is in the imperfect tense and might be translated "from this point forward, he *began* to see all things clearly," in contrast to the result of the first attempt.

Finally, **Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village"** (8:26). It is uncertain if Mark wanted the reader to understand this as a command for secrecy similar to other miracles (see 1:44; 5:43; 7:36). But it seems as if knowledge of this miracle might have caused a newfound popularity for Jesus in this territory, thereby interrupting the private teaching He planned for His disciples.

The oddity of this healing story is the necessity of two touches by Jesus to heal the man. The larger Markan context reveals the pervasive effect of blindness and the gradual recovery of sight for Jesus' disciples. Markan scholar Morna Hooker closes her discussion of this passage with these words:

The constant inability of the disciples in the chapters that follow this scene to understand Jesus' teaching about suffering—a failure which is remarkably similar to their inability beforehand to understand the significance of His words and deeds—suggests that Mark regards the disciples as semi-blind until the resurrection; until then

they are in the position of the half-cured man, who could barely distinguish between men and trees.¹

As will be demonstrated in the next passage, it is quite possible to walk through life, even side-by-side with Jesus, having eyes only half open. Discipleship inside the church and formal education outside the church, though essential, are no substitute for the transforming power of the Cross. Spiritual blindness must be dealt with by Christ before we can stop thinking like humans and begin to think like God (8:33).

2. YOU ARE THE CHRIST 8:27–30

This paragraph has been called by many as the watershed of Mark's gospel. The character of the story changes dramatically following this short interchange between Jesus and His disciples. Nothing would ever be the same.

The town of Caesarea Philippi was at the northernmost point of Jesus' journeys, twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida. Caesarea Philippi was situated at the source of the Jordan River at the base of Mount Hermon. Caesar Augustus, to whom Herod dedicated a temple to the Greek god Pan, had originally given the land to Herod the Great. In 3 B.C. Herod's son Philip rebuilt the village and renamed it Caesarea Philippi to honor Caesar Augustus. Thus, the region was closely tied to Roman allegiances, making it theologically significant that Jesus was first declared the Christ in the land that proclaimed Caesar as lord.

It was while they were **on the way** that Jesus began His inquiry of the disciples. As mentioned previously, the phrase "on the way" (*hodos*) is more than a directional marker, for it became a metaphor for the direction God set before Jesus and the way Jesus called His disciples to follow by faith. Though this is the farthest distance Jesus would be from Jerusalem, it is the place of His clearest self-revelation. From there He turned and set His face toward the cross (see Luke 9:51).

Jesus' initial question was generic in nature: "**Who do people say I am?**" (8:27). The three options offered identify Him as a prophet-like figure. "**Some say John the Baptist**" (8:28). Herod Antipas's conjecture

in 6:16 that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead seems to have been on a par with popular opinion. **"Others say Elijah."** The belief that Jesus was John or Elijah implied that He was simply one in a line of prophets. Further, the general statement, **one of the prophets**, assigns to Jesus merely a preparatory function rather than a fulfillment or consummation role. Jesus' being discussed in the company of prophets demonstrates that the people failed to grasp the full significance of His person and, therefore, His mission.

Jesus' words **"But what about you?"** (8:29) have a strong contrasting tone in the original language, indicating that there was a better answer. The disciples had been entrusted with the "secret of the kingdom of God" (4:11), and they were being called to evaluate all the data they had accumulated about Jesus. **"Who do you say I am?"** In both clauses of 8:29, the pronoun **you** is second-person plural, making this a general question placed before the disciples as a group. **Peter answered.** Peter often functioned as the spokesperson for the entire group (see 9:5; 10:28; 11:21; 14:29). Yet the disciples were usually depicted as operating with one mind, even though only one spoke. In the gospel of Mark, the disciples operated as one like-minded unit rather than as twelve individuals. Unity is a fine thing, except that for the remainder of the Gospel the disciples were in discontinuity with the teaching and mission of Christ.

"You are the Christ" (8:29). The term **Christ**, meaning "anointed one" in Greek, is the equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah." For the Jews of Jesus' day, "Christ" was not a title that contained a divine designation. In the Old Testament, it did not serve as a technical term for a coming deliverer. It was not until the intertestamental period (430 B.C.–6 B.C.) that there arose a range of eschatological hopes of a Davidic deliverer. By the time of Jesus, these seemed to coalesce into two major categories: (1) a popular hope for national liberation from the Roman rulers; and (2) a recognition of the need for the spiritual renewal of Israel herself. This confession of Peter represents a newfound sense of faith. The hopes of this small band of followers and the nation as a whole were pinned on their understanding of the term "Christ."

Up until this point in the narrative, the only title by which the disciples have addressed Jesus is "teacher" (4:38), and that term is used twice as often

by others than by the disciples.² Even the term "Lord" was only spoken from the mouth of the Gentile woman (7:28) whose girl was healed.

The disciples had seen the demons cast out, assisted at the feeding of many people, and witnessed the sick healed. But it was not obvious to them that Jesus is the Messiah because Israel is not free from their Roman rulers. So, Peter, as the spokesman for the disciples, placed all their hopes in Jesus to perform this Messiah-based task. But Jesus refused to have this chief designation of His mission communicated to the crowds with such a restrictive, military-like agenda, so He **warned them not to tell anyone about him** (8:30). The second half of the Gospel defines the kind of Messiah Jesus truly is. The disciples were not to speak about Him as Messiah until they integrated His suffering, rejection, death, and vindicating resurrection into their message of the Messiah.

3. JESUS' FIRST PASSION PREDICTION 8:31–33

Coupled with the immediately preceding command to silence, the core of Jesus' self-revelation began with a redirection of the disciples' choice of titles. They chose Messiah; Jesus offered another, more enigmatic title: **the Son of Man** (8:31).³ What Jesus was about to say regarding suffering and death might have been incomprehensible if He had retained the disciples' more victorious-sounding title: "Christ." Jesus would not allow himself to be categorized. For Jesus, the title "Christ" carried too much militaristic and nationalistic baggage; it had to be tempered with the less familiar "Son of Man" designation. He went on to teach His disciples the essential issues with reference to His identity.

The **"Son of Man must suffer many things"** (8:31). The disciples had seen nothing but power and victory in the acts of Jesus thus far. So these words had no place to take root. Moreover, the suffering and death of the Messiah raised huge theological problems. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, why would God allow Him to **be rejected** and **be killed** (8:31)? Though the answer is not fully elucidated in the gospel of Mark, it is part of a plan found in the Old Testament. Mark reported that the Son of Man must suffer many things. The word **must** is often used of divine necessity as spelled out later in 9:12 and 14:21, 49. Thus, Jesus' rejection and death

are to find their source in Scripture and the heart of the Father's will and not in the violence of Palestinian politics. Mark would not allow Jesus' death to be read as a sociological mistake but rather as an act of divine redemption.

CHART		
THREE PASSION PREDICTIONS IN MARK		
Mark 8:31	Mark 9:31	Mark 10:33-34
He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.	He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."	"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

The wording of each of the three passion predictions is just a bit different. It is only in this passage that the reader of Mark sees the word **suffer**. But with **rejected**, Mark draws attention to Psalm 118:22, where Christians identify in Jesus' fate that the "stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" and His following vindication.⁴ Each of the three passion predictions ends with the same climax: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The disciples were no more attentive to this aspect of Jesus' teaching than any other.

No matter how much explanation He provided, the disciples never achieved complete clarity. This unveiling of the messianic mission demanded a response from the disciples. And it came from Peter as **he took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him** (8:32). Peter displayed that he was at cross-purposes with Jesus' agenda. The word "rebuke" connotes a command by one taking authority over another. Jesus, without hesitation, **turned and looked at his disciples** (8:33), implicating them

as coconspirators, as **he rebuked Peter**. The repetition of the same verb (8:31, command of Jesus to disciples; 8:32, Peter's rebuke of Jesus; 8:33, Jesus' rebuke to Peter) demonstrates irreconcilable perspectives. Jesus settled the issue when He ordered Peter to get behind Him. Note how this short statement is spatially as well as relationally oriented. First, Jesus said, "**Get behind me.**" This is the same language used by Jesus in His initial call of His disciples in 1:17 and could be translated, "Come, behind Me." This might be understood as Jesus calling Peter to get back in step with Him. Further, there is another occurrence of the word in the next verse, where the phrase is translated, "**If anyone would come after me**" (8:34), cementing Peter's call to follower-ship based not on his notion of power or might, but on Jesus' revelation of rejection, shame, and death.

Relationally, Jesus called Peter "**Satan.**" In short order, Jesus completed His own counter-rebuke of Peter. Peter's plan, which avoided the cross, placed him in league with Jesus' archenemy. This is partially why Jesus commanded (rebukes) the disciples to silence, for the proclamation of a Messiah without the cross is satanic in its message. This exchange was brought to a culmination with Jesus' closing reproof: "**You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men**" (8:33). The NIV makes this a separate sentence, while in actuality it is a dependent clause, specifically a result clause: "for you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of people." The plain teaching of Jesus (8:31) cannot be grasped on a merely human level.

The vision for ministry that Jesus is teaching is irreconcilable with the vision Peter and the other disciples have for Him as the Messiah. The misguided vision of the disciples and their determined refusal to adopt

WHAT OTHERS SAY

VISION

The fact is this: we all need a vision. A vision is necessary because of the restless insistence of the mind to find answers to its questions and to organize reality into understandable patterns. A vision also gives us direction for behavior. It gives life predictability. Because of my vision . . . I know how to act. . . . To the extent that we are blind or have distorted reality our lives and happiness have been diminished. Consequently, if we are to change, if we are to grow there must be a change in the basic vision.

—John Powell

Insight into the Messiah's Task

Jesus' revelation precludes them from full comprehension. Teaching, even from such a skilled educator as Jesus, would not adequately overcome humanity's blindness. Thus, Mark conveys a truth that became Christian doctrine: Men and women must not merely become educated (or catechized) in the Church; they must initially be transformed.

ENDNOTES

What Others Say Sidebar. John Powell, *Fully Human, Fully Alive: A New Life Through a New Vision* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communication, 1976), p. 52.

1. Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), p. 198.

2. Disciples use it in 4:38; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1. Others use it in 5:35; 9:17; 10:17, 20; 12:14, 19, 32; 14:14.

3. For a Son of Man discussion, see 2:10.

4. See also Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:7.