

Sign-Seekers
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Text: Mark 8:11-13 (see also Matt. 15:39-16:4)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Demand for a Sign

Central Idea of Message: When it comes to signs, it is best to accept the signs God gives us on his own initiative rather than demand signs of our own choosing.

Introduction: Mark's gospel narrative continues as he records another encounter with everybody's favorite guest stars - the Pharisees.

In this episode, a group of Pharisees demand from Jesus a sign to prove that his authority is from God above. Here is Mark's account of Jesus' interaction with these sign-seekers.

I. The Demand from the Pharisees (v. 11)

- A. Some Pharisees came to Jesus and began to argue with him
- B. Pharisees
 - 1. Men who claimed to be followers of the Law of Moses to the letter [and well beyond]
 - 2. They were steeped in man-made rules and regulations
 - 3. They were legalists and ritualists, meaning they believed that in keeping all their rules, regulations, and rituals they earned right standing before God
 - 4. They mercilessly condemned anyone who did not keep their laws
 - 5. **"The Pharisees were the ritualists, the Sadducees, the rationalists" (Wuest 1:159)**
- C. They apparently pounced on Jesus, figuratively speaking, shortly after arriving by boat in the district of Dalmanutha
 - 1. They were, undoubtedly, quite contentious, vehemently cross-examining Jesus about his practices
 - 2. Jesus was defending his position, therefore a dispute was occurring

3. Let's not miss pointing out the contrast Mark has established, that Jesus was readily accepted by a Syrophoenician Canaanite steeped in Greek religion but regarded as a demon-possessed imposter and utterly rejected by his Israelite kinsmen who had been steeped in Judaism, that is to say the religion of the Jews according to the scribes and Pharisees
- D. They were wanting Jesus to give evidence of his trustworthiness
 1. They challenged him to provide a sign from heaven to validate that he was sent from God
 2. **A sign was a miraculous act with an ethical dimension which points beyond itself and testifies to the power, divine character, and authority of the doer - Jesus (cf. Vincent 1:206)**
 3. A group of scribes had already accused him of being demon-possessed back in Mark 3:22-30
 4. Their demand for a sign was a test, really a temptation, to see if he was an imposter or the real Messiah
 - a) But their request was quite insincere
 - b) They wanted his sign to be something from the sky
 - (1) "Jewish superstition held that demons could work signs on earth, but that only God could work them in heaven" (Dummelow 679)
 - (2) Fire falling from heaven [lightning] and consuming something like Elijah had done?
 - (3) Voice from heaven?
 - (4) Clap of thunder?
 - (5) Manna from heaven?
 - (6) Sun and moon to stand still?
 - c) What they probably really wanted was for him to provide a sign right before their very eyes so they could attribute its source to Satan and condemn him to death for his "black magic"
 5. Jesus knew that they still would not have believed he was sent from God and deeply resented their demand for a sign (cf. Robertson 1:331)

II. The Denial by Jesus (v. 12)

- A. Jesus sighed deeply

1. Perhaps a form of exasperation with the constant needling he received from most of the Pharisees he encountered
 2. Certainly an expression of both personal indignation and authentic grief over their unbelief
 - a) They were not looking for truth
 - b) They were not looking to have their faith activated
 - c) They were not open to believing any of Jesus' claims
 - d) They just wanted to argue, fight, and force capitulation from Jesus and his disciples
 - e) They wanted to convert him over to their way of thinking or kill him [sounds like a Muslim extremist of our day]
- B. Why does this generation seek for a sign?
1. *Generation* certainly means, in specific, these Pharisees and the nation of Israel which they represent, as in faithless sign-seekers who are blind to the true identity of Jesus and are demanding "proof of their own choosing" (cf. Barry Mark 8:12; Grassmick 2:137)
 2. Such a description, therefore, is not restricted to those living only at the time Jesus lived, but is, rather, descriptive of anyone living at any time who shows these same characteristics of stubborn faithlessness which demands proof of their own choosing
 3. Moses had experienced the same from the wilderness generation which he had to put up with for forty years (cf. Deut. 32:5-20)
 4. The last generations of humans on earth will become more faithless and perverse than their predecessors (see also Matt. 11:16-24; 23:34-36; 2 Tim. 3:1-5)
- C. No sign shall be given to a generation of sign-seekers
1. Jesus is stating a sort of oath in very strong terms
 2. "Jesus is declaring that a particular thing will not happen in the future" (Decker 210)
 3. Jesus was implying, "May God do such and such to me if I comply with your demand and give you a sign" (cf. Zerwick 131; 2 Kings 6:31; Ps. 95:10-11)

4. **The grammatical construction Jesus used to express his vigorous refusal to provide a sign is called an apocopated curse formula (cf. Lane 278)**
5. **"A generation incapable of appreciating such demonstrations shall not be gratified with them" (Brown 2:78)**
6. **Jesus would never agree to grant a sign to the faithless Pharisees tempting him except for the sign of Jonah in the belly of the fish, which amounts to the promise of Jesus' own resurrection (cf. Matt. 12:38-42)!**
7. If you are wondering why Mark did not include the reference to Jonah which Matthew did mention regarding this encounter with the Pharisees, it is likely because Mark is writing for Gentile readers who would be unfamiliar with the Old Testament and an Israelite prophet named Jonah (cf. Wiersbe, *Exposition*, 1:137)

III. The Departure of Jesus (v. 13)

- A. Jesus walked away from them
 1. Sometimes, politely walking away is better than staying and arguing
 2. This is not Jesus' first encounter with Pharisees, and wouldn't be his last
 3. He seems to have chosen, at least in this instance, not to cast his pearls before swine
- B. He boarded a boat: likely the same one he had just rowed in on
- C. He went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee
 1. Jesus left this trouble behind knowing fully that more troubles awaited him at other destinations
 2. He was not running from trouble or from challenges
 3. He was on a divine mission that did not need to be abruptly shortened wasting time and energy on "stubbornized" religious fanatics
 4. This departure effectively ended his public ministry in Galilee (cf. Grassmick 2:137)
 5. **There are times when further talk with some unbelievers, especially hostile ones, is absolutely useless and nothing more than an effort in futility**

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) Faith does not ask for signs, whereas unbelief [faithlessness] does, because believing faith takes God at his word.

(2) When it comes to signs, it is best to accept the signs God gives us on his own initiative rather than demand signs of our own choosing.

(3) The Pharisees that day would never have changed their minds about Jesus no matter what sign he provided, because some people simply refuse to be persuaded regarding the validity of Jesus Christ and the Bible that tells us about him, since their only objective is to discredit both Jesus and the Bible.

(4) The demand of many for a sign is not to prove to them that Jesus is the divine agent of God, but to prove to them that he is not if they don't get what *they prescribed*.

(5) Jesus' refusal to produce a sign from heaven except his resurrection proved to be quite prophetic, because these Pharisees, and a host of others since then, have rejected even this greatest of all of his signs.

(6) "When the motive is wrong and faith is absent, demands do not bring a response" (Godwin 70).

(7) Saving faith is not built on signs but on God's Son and on God's Word.

(8) The Good News [gospel] of Jesus Christ and its extreme value remain hidden from unbelieving eyes, ears, and minds.

(9) Jesus has never blessed unbelief and he is not going to start doing so now.

(10) Jesus himself is the greatest sign ever given [virgin-born, sinless perfection, absolute power, voluntary substitutionary death, predicted resurrection] and he will never be outdone!

(11) Be a believer in Jesus as the Christ [Messiah/Anointed One], Son of God, Savior of the world, Savior of you!