

# MARK

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In this lesson, focused on Mark Chapter 7, Jesus and his followers are once again on the move. Opening the chapter, we see that they have returned to Capernaum. From here, Mark will follow Jesus through his confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees at his home base there, then travel north and west up to Tyre, and then on to Sidon, a seaport on the Mediterranean in Lebanon. From Sidon, Jesus and his disciples will cross back again to the east, staying well north of the Galilee region, then traveling down into the area of the Decapolis—the ten Roman cities, nine of which are located on the Jordan side of the Jordan river. I have included two pictures in this lesson, a picture I shared in an earlier lesson—the temple at Capernaum where Jesus taught—and a second one of the ruins at Beit She'an, the former Decapolis city of Scythopolis. It was at Beit She'an, on top of that mound, that the Philistines hung the body of Saul. The Romans rebuilt the city around 60 B.C.; and, by the time of Christ, it had become one of the ten cities of the Decapolis.

In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus points out a serious flaw in the teachings of the religious leaders. In doing so, he will again try to open the eyes and minds of his disciples who have been taught by these leaders. Following that teaching, we will travel with him to Syria, outside the land of Palestine, for the one and only time in Jesus' ministry; there, we will see him accomplish an unusual miracle. Following that, we will travel back across the northernmost part of Palestine and then head south into the area of the Decapolis cities. We do not know exactly which city he visited on this trip, but his visits and the associated impact on the Decapolis regions are well documented in scripture. While under Roman rule, these cities were populated with Jews and Gentiles as we've already studied; and Jesus made certain to spread the Gospel there as well.

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*Let's read through Mark 7 and consider the following questions.*

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1. What can we learn about ourselves from looking at what the Pharisees both did and said in Mark 7:1-5?
  - a. ANSWER 1: Instead of judging Jesus and his disciples based on miracles, healings, his power over demons, and his teachings about the kingdom; the Pharisees were focused on external things that man held as important.
  - b. ANSWER 2: We do this today when we judge based on man's ideals. We find errors in the church bulletin, or criticize someone for their dress, or their music—rather than searching to see if the Holy Spirit is at work in that person.
2. What did Jesus point out to the Pharisees and teachers of the law—the very people who should know the law inside out? (see Mark 7:6-13)
  - a. ANSWER 1: He pointed out that to the religious leaders that they were not following God's laws at all. They were in fact following man's laws—many of which they had created, known as traditions—and not God's laws.
  - b. ANSWER 2: Furthermore, their worship was superficial. Jesus pointed out that Isaiah had it right, i.e., that they were honoring God with their lips, but not with their hearts.

3. Jesus continues to point out the error of the Jewish leaders' ways. In Mark 7:8, he tells them that they had "let go of the commands of God and were holding on to human traditions." He then cites a specific example of how they conveniently set aside God's commands in order to observe their own traditions. What is the example that he gives them? Do we see anything like this today? What can we learn from this one example? (see Mark 7:9-13) (See also Exodus 20:12, 21:17, Deuteronomy 5:16, Leviticus 20:9, and 1 Timothy 5:4 and 5:8)
  - a. ANSWER 1: All those who took this Temple vow were committing all of their resources to the work of the Temple. In practice, what they were doing was legally saying that their aging parents had no claim on anything. They were setting aside their assets and putting a superficial fence around them with this vow. The person taking the vow was therefore exempt from following God's laws based on man's rules. He was disrespecting his parents and avoiding his responsibilities to them.
  - b. ANSWER 2: God's law is clear, as articulated in Exodus 20:12, 21:17, Deuteronomy 5:16, and Leviticus 20:9. We are responsible for respecting and caring for our parents, period; no exceptions. Paul addresses this again in 1 Timothy 5:4 and 5:8.
  - c. ANSWER 3: To make matters worse, they were distorting God's word to support their tradition. By incorporating the law regarding a vow (see Numbers 30:1-2), the religious leaders established a tradition of their own making, as though it was a vow to follow God's laws.
  - d. ANSWER 4: What we can see from this example is man's capacity and tendency to distort and ignore God's teaching; and, in its place, hold up man's intellect, man's ideals, and man's traditions as having authority over God's.
  - e. ANSWER 5: Invoking God's name in order to cover a sin is just as prevalent today as it was then. Man's rules, man's doctrines, and man's desires take on a "holy" look and feel, but that doesn't make them right. Teaching others to follow those made-up rules is as evil today as it was then. We can see many examples of this in the "cult" religions of the world, and sadly even in some mainstream Christian congregations where, for example, the church by-laws are regarded as the ultimate authority, and not the Word of God.
4. Now Jesus calls the crowd to him. I am assuming that the crowd had gathered as they heard Jesus talking to the religious leaders. Using the Pharisees' encounter, what did Jesus teach the crowd that ran counter to the traditions taught by their religious leaders? (see Mark 7:14-15)
  - a. ANSWER: He told them that what they ate, or drank, didn't make them unclean; all food was clean. Nothing we take in or consume will make us unclean; it is only what comes out of us that makes us unclean.
5. As plain as Jesus' teaching was, even the disciples didn't understand it. Jesus had to explain it to them. What did Jesus teach them? Can you cite examples today that resemble the teachings of the Pharisees as contrasted by those of Jesus? (see Mark 7:16-23)
  - a. ANSWER 1: Jesus taught them that focusing on what someone eats or drinks is the wrong focus. Those physical things are digested and then passed from the body. What matters is the heart, and whether that heart honors God or man. He cited "all evil thoughts" as coming from the heart, including "sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy slander, arrogance and folly."
  - b. ANSWER 2: We can easily see this same situation in our world today. How many folks do you know who are religiously faithful to eat only the healthiest food and drink, get regular exercise, and think that in doing so they are "living right?" How many world religions do you know that focus on physical things, e.g., certain prayers, or a certain diet, or various fasts, etc.—believing that in doing these things they will find eternal happiness? Meanwhile, all manner of evil thoughts, sexual immorality, and so on can be seen in their actions.
  - c. ANSWER 3: Jesus is teaching us to focus on the important eternal things of God and not the physical and intellectual world of man.
6. Jesus then leaves Capernaum and travels to Tyre, a seaport city in Lebanon about 10-15 miles north of today's Israel Lebanon border. Arriving in secret, the scripture tells us that he did not want anyone to know he was there. What is interesting about what happens next? How did this woman know Jesus was there, and why was she so determined to see him? (see Mark 7:24-26)
  - a. ANSWER 1: Clearly, people outside of Palestine were hearing about, and in some cases had seen, Jesus and his authority over demons. This woman was a Greek living in Tyre; Jews lived there as well. We can imagine that when someone began to spread the word about Jesus being in the city, she was quick to discover his location.
  - b. ANSWER 2: Her desire to see Jesus was for purely unselfish reasons. She didn't want to see Jesus for her sake, but for the sake of her daughter who was possessed by "an impure spirit."
7. What did Jesus say to the Greek woman when she asked him for help, and what did he mean by it? (see Mark 7:27)
  - a. ANSWER 1: He told her that the "little children" were to eat "all they want" first, and that it was not right to toss that food "to the dogs."
  - b. ANSWER 2: In reality, he was telling her that the Gospel was to go to the Jew first, and then the Gentiles—that she should wait her turn, once he was finished feeding the Jews.

8. Following Jesus' sharp response, the woman would not be turned away, and responded back to Jesus. What did she say, and what happened because of that response? (see Mark 7:28-30)
    - a. ANSWER: She understood enough about what Jesus was saying, but she also understood that Jesus' power over demons was universal and not just for the Jews. She didn't want anything for herself, only that he would help her daughter. She acknowledged in her reply that even a beggar gets and eats crumbs, and that was all she was asking for. As a result of her faith and humility, Jesus told her to go home, and that the demon had left her daughter.
  9. We have seen Jesus drive out demons in earlier chapters in Mark. However, besides the fact that she was a Greek Gentile, what makes this miracle so different that Mark would include it here?
    - a. ANSWER 1: This is the first time that we see Jesus drive out a demon without physically being present with the demon. This miracle shows his absolute authority over the entire world, and that he is not limited to physical locations.
    - b. ANSWER 2: This is important for us to remember today as well. We can pray for missionaries in foreign countries, sick people in other states, and so on, knowing that Jesus has the power and authority to answer each prayer regardless of his location, our location, or theirs.
  10. Jesus leaves Tyre and heads north a few miles along the Mediterranean coast to Sidon. From here he turns east and heads across and down the Sea of Galilee, once again into the region of the Decapolis—the ten Roman cities. Here, he performs another miracle; what was it? (see Mark 7:31-35)
    - a. ANSWER: Once again, we see a great story of intervention on the part of people for a mute and deaf man. They "begged" Jesus to place a hand on him and heal him. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd, placing his fingers in the man's ears, spitting on his hand, and touching the man's tongue; he looks toward heaven and says "Be Opened!". Instantly, the man could hear and speak.
  11. Jesus tells them something that is hard for us to believe. He tells them not to tell anyone. Can you imagine? You have just witnessed the healing of a deaf and mute person, but you can't tell anyone. Consider the man himself; how could he literally not say anything? What actually happened? (see Mark 7:36-37)
    - a. ANSWER: The crowd was so "amazed" that Jesus could make the "deaf hear and the mute speak." that they couldn't stop talking about it, even though Jesus continued to command them not to say anything.
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As we close this lesson, let me ask you if Jesus has ever done a miracle in your life, and you were so excited about it that you couldn't help tell others? That was clearly how the Greek woman, and the crowd with the deaf and mute man, all felt. They couldn't stop talking about it. Jesus only made one trip out of Palestine, and yet his teaching and miracles were well known there. Years later, a church would be established in Sidon; and at one point even Paul would visit it. Similarly, in the Decapolis, word spread quickly about Jesus. As we will see in our next lesson, Mark Chapter 8, the results of his early ministry continue to attract larger and larger crowds. In spite of the limitations on communications and travel, the Gospel was beginning to spread throughout Palestine and even to regions outside of Palestine. The same is true today—nothing can hinder God's great Gospel being proclaimed to anyone, anywhere.

Let's commit to being as excited as those we looked at in this lesson, as we share our Jesus experiences with others. Our light shines brighter than we might imagine in this very lost and dying world. Find ways this week to let yours shine, as Jesus continues building his church, searching for his lost sheep.

In Christ,

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