

# JESUS EXPERIENCES HOSTILITY FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Matthew 15:1 - 16:12; Mark 7:1 - 8:26

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Jesus

**Key-locations:** Jesus went northeast to Tyre and Sidon. Then he went north through Phoenicia, east towards Hermon and south into Decapolis and Lake Galilee.

**Key-repetitions:**

- Disputes between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders: the dispute about traditions with the teachers of the Law of Moses and Pharisees (Mt 15:1-20); the dispute with the Pharisees and Sadducees about signs (Mt 15:39 - 16:4; Mk 8:10-12).
- People coming to Jesus seeking a miracle or healing: the mother of the demon-possessed daughter (Mt 15:21-22); crowds brought the lame, blind, crippled, mute and others (Mt 15:30); Pharisees and Sadducees asked for a sign from heaven (Mt 16:1); people brought a blind man (Mk 8:22-26).
- Miracles: the healing of the demon-possessed daughter (Mt 15:21-28); many sick people were healed (Mt 15:29-31); the feeding of four thousand (Mt 15:32-39); the healing of a blind man (Mk 8:22-26).
- Jesus gave orders not to talk about a miracle: he commanded people not to tell anyone about his healing a deaf man (Mk 7:36); he told the healed blind man not to go into the village (Mk 8:26).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Hostility dominated the dispute between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders.
- The severe censorship Jesus directed to his disciples.
- The self-centeredness of people who sought cures, wanting to use Jesus for personal benefit.

**Initial-situation:**

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted three years. During the first year, the crowds were going to hear and to be baptized by John the Baptist while Jesus was coming out

of obscurity. John the Baptist was imprisoned during second year of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus' popularity grew with the multitudes; however, Jesus began to have conflict with the Jewish religious leaders. The third year of Jesus' public ministry began with John the Baptist's death. The year has two divisions: the **Semester of Retreats**, when Jesus made three retreats to be with the disciples in order to give them special instruction; and the **Semester of Encounters in Jerusalem**, when Jesus made three trips to Jerusalem. This last one ended with his death.

The first retreat began when Jesus received the sad news of John the Baptist's death. At Capernaum, he got into a boat with his disciples to go to a deserted place. A crowd saw them get into the boat and ran on foot around the lake. Jesus performed the miracle of feeding five thousand men. After the miracle, the people wanted to make Jesus king by force. Jesus sent the disciples in a boat across the lake and early the next morning joined them by walking on water. The crowd found Jesus in Capernaum. There he dialogued with them about his being the Bread of Life. When Jesus refused to lead the popular movement to annihilate Herod, he was abandoned by many.

Jesus' refusal to lead revolutionary forces against Herod was the decisive point that ended his popularity with the people. The year that had produced constant growth in popularity ended—a year began that would produce a series of painful rejections that would end with his dying on the cross.

**Initial-problem:**

Some Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses came from Jerusalem and asked Jesus why his disciples did not live according to the tradition of the elders.

**Final-situation:**

Jesus warned his disciples to guard against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and he ordered people whom he healed not to tell others about it.

## BIBLE STORY

### **Argument about Traditions** Mk 7:1-23; Mt 15:1-20

The Pharisees and some teachers of the Law of Moses who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. They saw some of his disciples eating their food with hands that were ritually unclean. The disciples had not followed the tradition of ritual washing before meals. It was the Jewish

custom to never eat unless they washed their hands following a ceremonial ritual handed down by past generations. When Jews came from the marketplace, they did not eat unless they went through the motion of a ritual hand-washing. Also, they observed many other traditions, such as the proper way to wash cups, pitchers and kettles.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of past generations instead of eating their food with unclean hands?"

Jesus replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites and wrote, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are only rules made up by humans.'"

Jesus illustrated what he meant, "You have a clever way of rejecting God's commands in order to observe your own traditions! For example, Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever financial help you might have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' that man is excused of his obligation to help his father and mother. Thus your tradition nullifies the word of God. And you do many things like that" (Mk 7:1-13).

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me; I want everyone to understand this. Nothing that goes into a person's mouth from the outside can make him unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean."

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him to explain this saying. Jesus answered, "You are so dull. Don't you understand? Nothing that enters a person's mouth from the outside can make him unclean because it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, through the intestines and then out of the body." In saying this, Jesus declared all foods fit to be eaten.

Jesus went on, "What comes out of a person is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils thoughts come from inside and make a person unclean to worship God" (Mk 7:14-23).

### **Healing the Daughter of a Syro-Phoenician Woman** Mk 7:24-30; Mt 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre for the second retreat with his disciples. He entered a house and did not want anyone to find him. Yet he could not remain hidden. In fact, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit heard where he was. She came and knelt at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in the part of Syrian known as Phoenicia. She was from a country that had persecuted the Jews. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter (Mk 7:24-26).

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps following and shouting out after us."

Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

The woman knelt before him and pleaded, "Lord, help me!" (Mt 15:23-25).

Jesus told her, "First let the children eat all they want; it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs."

She replied, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the scraps dropped by the children."

Jesus responded, "Because of your answer, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone (Mk 7:27-30).

## **Retreat: North Through Phoenicia, East Towards Hermon and South into Decapolis**

Mt 15:29-38; Mk 7:31-8:9

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of Decapolis (Mk 7:31).

Jesus walked along Lake Galilee. Then he climbed a mountain. Great crowds came to him bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. They praised the God of Israel (Mt 15:30-31).

## **Pharisees and Sadducees Demand a Sign Mt 16:1-12; Mk 8:10-26**

Jesus began his third retreat with his disciples.

Some Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven, in order to prove himself to them.

Jesus replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'The sky is red; it will be fair weather.' When it is morning, you say, 'The sky is red and dark; today it will be stormy.' You know how to forecast the weather by interpreting the signs in the sky; however, you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and unfaithful generation looks for a miraculous sign. The only sign you will see is what happened to Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away (Mt 16:1-4).

When Jesus and his disciples crossed over to the other side of the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. Jesus told them, "Be careful, be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

They discussed this among themselves and said, "He says this because we didn't bring any bread."

Jesus was aware of their discussion. Jesus asked, "What little faith you have! Why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 16:5-12).

Jesus and his disciples arrived at Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch the man. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Jesus spit into the man's eyes, placed his hands on the blind man and asked, "Do you see anything?"

The man looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. This time the man's eyes were opened. Perfect eyesight returned, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him straight home, saying, "Don't go into the village" (Mk 8:22-26).

## **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?

6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

## SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the things that made the religious leaders hostile toward Jesus?
2. What were some of the miracles that Jesus performed?
3. According to Jesus, what is the source of all evil acts?
4. How did Jesus and the religious leaders disagree about manmade traditions developed by past generations?
5. What are some religious traditions that have been beneficial to past generations that may not be needed today?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. The Bible is more important than religious rules and regulations not found in the Bible. The Pharisees argued with Jesus because his disciples didn't follow religious traditions (Mt 15:1-20). Religious tradition refers to thoughts, writings, teachings, and practices that have been followed for many years and which influence conduct, faith and practices of religious people in the present. Tradition comes from people; however, the Bible comes from God. If religious tradition disagrees with the Bible, follow the Bible. If religious tradition doesn't disagree with the Bible, we may choose to follow or to reject the tradition. Many traditions add richness to life and worship; however, they are not to be elevated to a sacred standing.
2. Hypocrisy is pretending to be something that one is not. At the time when Jesus lived, a hypocrite was an actor performing in a theatrical event. When the Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses professed a loyalty to God that was not manifested by their attitudes and actions, they were only acting out a part (Mt 15:7; Mk 7:5-6).
3. The person who is interpreting God's Word may actually invalidate it with his explanation. Everyone's mind has been contaminated by sin and they can make mistakes when they interpret the Bible. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses invalidated God's Word by reinterpreting it and rationalizing away divine truths, and making their explanations agree with their traditions, rules, and regulations (Mt 15:6, Mk 7:13).
4. An evil action begins with an evil thought. Allowing one's mind to dwell on lust, envy, hatred, revenge, etc. leads to sin (Mt 15:16-20; Mk 7:20). The heart represents the center of the personality. It includes the brain, the will, the conscience and the source of human emotions.
5. Enemies of our people group should not be rejected as unworthy of God's mercy. Matthew calls the Syro-Phoenician woman a Canaanite (Mt 15:22). Her ancestors were enemies of Israel. Jews applied the term "Dog" to Gentiles, believing that pagan people were less likely than dogs to receive God's blessing. When Jesus used the word "Dog", he reflected the Jews' attitude; however, his actions showed that his attitude was in contrast to the Jews (Mt 15:26-28). Many Jews lost God's blessings and salvation because they rejected Jesus; yet, many Gentiles found salvation because they recognized and accepted him.
6. God's work is incomplete in the life of a person who sees others as though they were objects. The blind man was partially healed when he saw people as though they were trees walking around. Jesus completed the miracle, allowing the man to see everything clearly (Mk 8:22-25).