



**UNIT 9 LESSON 6**  
**MARK 8:27 - 9:50**

**DOES THE MESSIAH SUFFER?**

This study passage for this lesson can be divided into three main sections:

1. Chapter 8:27 - 9:13. Is Jesus really the Messiah?
2. Chapter 9:14-32. Why cannot people believe it?
3. Chapter 9:33-50. What it means to follow the Messiah!

The final section of the study passage for Lesson 5 leads into the important opening section of this passage.

**1. IS JESUS REALLY THE MESSIAH? (Chapter 8:27 - 9:13)**

- a) Check the location of Caesarea Philippi. This place was associated with many forms of worship: Baal of the Old Testament; the Greek god Pan and Roman Caesar worship. It is significant that Peter's great confession of Jesus as Messiah took place here.

The teaching that Jesus now gives his disciples (31-33) and the public (34-38) is a deliberate plan to give them a new conception of a familiar idea – Messiah. For centuries, devout Jews had been awaiting a man who would be God's chosen one, one who would lead the people to freedom and salvation. However, they didn't expect that he would go about his task in the way that Jesus did, and they didn't expect it to entail the things that Jesus said it would. So they were not too sure about Jesus and his claims. In fact, it seemed to them wrong that the Messiah would be rejected by the leaders (31). Hence Peter's strong reaction (32) and Jesus' even stronger one (33). Of course, Jesus had been fighting the temptation to adopt the easier course of action ever since the "Temptations" (Mark 1:11,12 and Matthew 4). Even a disciple could be the embodiment of Satan by mouthing the words of temptation - "Don't die, there is a better and more spectacular way to glory than that!"

Some of the hopes the Jewish people had for their Messiah are found in:- Isaiah 9:7; 11:1, Jeremiah 22:4; 23:5; 30:9, Psalms 2, 110.

During the time of Jesus the Jewish people were under constant oppression, even to the point where they despaired of their survival and the survival of their faith. Increasingly they believed that the only hope was for God to break into the affairs of men. The existing age of men would give way to the "age to come" when God would rule in the person of the Messiah.

Preceding this period of time, horrors of every kind would be abroad in the earth. In the process of God's breaking in, the faithful ones (of course, this means the Jews!) would be exalted, and Jerusalem and Palestine would become the centre of the world.



Later Christian preachers asserted that all this had happened in Jesus (Acts 2:16). They could only assert this because they had come to believe it, first at Caesarea Philippi and then at the first Easter and Pentecost. Then they preached it far and wide.

The word "Messiah", is the Hebrew title for God's man who will lead His people, the anointed one; "Christ" is the Greek equivalent.

- b) The term Son of Man, verses 31,38 is used by Jesus here as a definite reference to those Messianic ideas. The term can mean simply, man, as we find it in the book of Ezekiel. Perhaps many of Jesus' listeners understood it that way. But many of them would have immediately noticed its messianic content. They would have remembered the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13f to whom eternal dominion over all nations was given.

But this reference implies that this Son of man will win an external, military-type victory. What astounds the hearers of Jesus is that He keeps associating the idea of the Son of man with suffering and death (see Mark 9:31; 10:33; 14:21,41). This suffering was not to be the end - there was always the resurrection (Mark 8:31) and the ultimate victory because of the suffering (Mark 13:26,27; 14:24,25,62).

The final incident of this section is the transfiguration. We may interpret this in a two-fold way.

First, it was to impress the truth of the foregoing teaching upon the minds of the disciples. The presence of Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet, on the mountain with Jesus indicates that what Jesus had taught was an authentic and divine teaching, witnessed by "the law and the prophets". The cloud was interpreted in the familiar Hebrew way as the sign of the presence of God.

The second point is that this incident had meaning for Jesus. We must not assume that Jesus faced the future with merely a grim, passion-less "saintly" or "divine" attitude. The mystery of his humanity makes it clear that he was "tempted in all points like a man". The strength of his rebuke to Peter reveals this; likewise his agony in the garden.

The baptism and temptations of Jesus, as well as the Transfiguration and the agony in the garden, must be interpreted as major stages in the mission of Jesus. The voice from heaven is directed towards Jesus as much as anyone else - and is for the purpose of giving him assurance of the Divine blessing as he pursues the Father's will to the bitter end.

The Messianic theme is not exhausted with the Transfiguration. The disciples still have questions and Jesus cautions them not to reveal what they have seen, because they have only experienced the first chapter of it as yet. (v.9)

The questions concerned Elijah, who was said to be the forerunner of the Messiah (see Malachi 3,4). The disciples needed to be told that Elijah had already come, in John the Baptist, (see Matt. 17:10-13). They also needed to know that his sudden death was proof that the Messiah also would suffer. (v.13).



## 2. WHY CANNOT PEOPLE BELIEVE IT?

This section was recorded by the gospel compiler to show how faith was necessary in the day to day affairs of life. That it should be closely associated with such "theological" and "heavenly" matters as the foregoing, i.e. the transfiguration, only goes to show that one must have an adequate understanding of God and a proper appreciation of him in worship to face life as it is.

This incident emphasises faith. Faith absent in the case of the disciples who tried to heal the boy, faith in doubt and confusion in the case of the three on the mountain, and real faith in spite of doubt in the case of the father.

The conversation with the disciples (v. 28,29) stresses the close relationship of prayer and faith. Some manuscripts add fasting to prayer as the means of faith. The original is certainly without this addition, but the fact that the addition is made reveals the high value placed on fasting by the early church.

## 3. WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW THE MESSIAH Chapter 9:33-50.

- a) The final section for study in this lesson deals with certain conditions which apply to anyone who follows the Messiah.

It is revealing that the disciples would not tell Jesus what they had been arguing about on the road (v.34). What seemed a reasonable thing to talk of as they walked single-file behind their leader now seemed most unworthy when they were face to face with him! Jesus didn't really need them to tell him, - he would have heard snatches of their proud arguments from the head of the line and now adopting the usual posture for a Jewish rabbi, he sat and gave them his teaching on the matter.

Note how this little incident is faithfully recorded, painting a little word picture of the life of that ancient community of rabbi and disciples. The child (v.36) was no doubt the child of the home where they were staying.

The point of the second incident (v.38-41) is well taken. Dr. R.A. Cole in his commentary on Mark says:-

"The whole theology of the Spirit was at stake here; the scribes had seen the work of the Spirit, yet deliberately misinterpreted it, putting it down to Beelzebub (Mark 3:22). But here were His own disciples, seeing and admitting a work of the Spirit, and still forbidding it. Wherein was the difference between disciples and scribes, if both were to oppose the Spirit's working?"

- b) The third paragraph (10:42-49) carries the theme on further to cover temptations to sin. The language is obviously figurative.

The overall motive is to follow the Messiah, and anything at all must be sacrificed to fulfil that purpose. We may compare Paul's words about unchastity in 1 Cor. 6:18,19, in which he urges a high standard, not for some moral purpose, but on account of our discipleship.



J.D. Jones in the *New Bible Commentary* says of v.42-49, "We must shrink from no spiritual surgery to save the life of the soul".

The word "hell" is in the Greek "gehenna", the "fire that never goes out".

Dr. Cole points out that Jesus did speak strong words about hell, but his words were addressed to his disciples or to religious leaders (Matt. 22:33) not to publicans and sinners. "The Lord spoke of hell to professed saints and of heaven to acknowledged sinners; we often reverse the process today."

- c) The sayings about salt (v.49 and 50) may be paraphrased as follows:

Every disciple must expect to pass through a testing time before his life counts for God, in the same way that the ancient sacrifices needed the addition of salt to make them acceptable in the sight of God (I Cor.3:13; Mal. 3:2; Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:9; 2 Chron. 13:5).

Disciples need to be an influence in the world, giving it meaning and purpose just as salt gives flavour and preservation to food.

In this chapter we have seen the contrast between the mind of Jesus and the mind of the disciples, a contrast that emphasises how alone Jesus was as he faced the cross. In the disciples we see a reflection of our own experiences. Even as followers of Jesus we lack understanding, we put confidence in religious leaders rather than in Scripture. We are frustrated and defensive when we are without power spiritually, fearful and concerned for our own position.

### **QUESTION 1:**

Mark 8:27-33. Upon the disciples' confession of belief that he is the Christ, the Messiah, what does Jesus now for the first time begin to teach them concerning the Messiah? What four specific things does he mention? What indicates that Jesus does not at this point teach in parables? How does Peter react to this teaching? Why?

### **QUESTION 2:**

Mark 9:2-13. Describe this event known as the transfiguration. When and where does it take place? Who are the witnesses? To what other unique event have these three men been witnesses (5:37-43)? How would the transfiguration confirm to the disciples the rightness of their confession in Mark 8:29?

### **QUESTION 3:**

Mark 9:14-29. Analyse what happened to the disciples in this episode. According to Jesus' diagnosis, why were they unable to handle the situation? What were they doing (v.14) instead of praying? About what, do you think, were they arguing with the Scribes? Rather than arguing about reasons for our ineffectiveness as Christians, what ought we to do (v. 28,29)?



**QUESTION 4:**

Mark 9:30-41. Compare the subject of concern on Jesus' mind (v.31) with that in the disciples' minds (v.33,34). How do the disciples feel when Jesus enquires about their discussion? Why? What events in this chapter may have led to the disciples' discussion?

**QUESTION 5:**

Of what is John reminded by Jesus' remark in Mark 9:37? Why did the disciples censure this man? How may the incident in Mark 9:14-29 have contributed to their attitude?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

In Mark 8:27-33 what 2 questions does Jesus put to his disciples? What is the significant difference between the two questions? If Jesus asked you both of these questions today, how would you answer each?