

# Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Feeds the Four Thousand

**Matthew 15:29-38 and Mark 7:31 to 8:9a**

**DIG:** What is Yeshua doing going into Gentile territory? How does that compare with Jewish expectations of the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:3-6)? How does this feeding of this multitude compare with the previous one (see Fn - Jesus Feeds the 5,000)? How do you account for the lack of insight by the apostles? What is Christ's reason for healing and feeding the multitude?

**REFLECT:** When you face overwhelming situations, how well do you remember God's provision in the past? What would stimulate your memory of ADONAI's mercy? Do you sometimes doubt Jesus' ability to meet your needs? How so? How are you discovering that He really can "shepherd" you? In what areas are you still unsure about that?

This is the last of four separate occasions where we see Jesus ministering to Gentiles in the Gospels. Each time, His ministry was greatly received and bore much fruit. The first time Yeshua had come to the region of Gadarenes, which is across the lake from Galilee, He had healed a man with a legion of demons inside of him. The Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:15, 18, 15:29; Mark 1:16, 7:31, which was really a lake, was sometimes called Lake Tiberias (John 6:1 and 23), or Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

The people there asked Jesus to leave the territory, but now He had come back. The demon-possessed man begged to go with Him, but the Lord sent him away because He was not accepting Gentile disciples at that time. He said: **Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you** (see Fg - Jesus Heals Two Demon Possessed Men). The man did so in the area of Decapolis, or ten Gentile cities, and we now see the results of that man's ministry.

Then Messiah left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. He left the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee and went southeast, and went around the eastern shore to reach the region of Decapolis. Although the Decapolis was made up of ten Gentile cities where idolatry prevailed, there were small Jewish communities within each city. In Mark's account we read about an incident of a Jew living in such a Greek city, which was not all that unusual. There, some fellow Jews brought Christ a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. Because he couldn't communicate, his friends talked for him. They begged Jesus to heal their friend by placing His hand on him (Mark 7:31-32).

Yeshua took him aside, away from the crowd. This was one of the drastic changes in the Lord's ministry after His rejection by the Sanhedrin (see Eh - [Jesus is Officially Rejected by the Sanhedrin](#)). Signs and miracles were no longer to authenticate that He was the long awaited Meshiach, they were only based on personal need (see En - [Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry](#)).

Notice that there is no consistent method to Jesus' healing. The miracle working Rabbi put His fingers into the man's ears to deal with the deafness. Then He spit and touched the man's tongue to deal with the speech problem. Christ looking up to heaven is best understood as an attitude of prayer (John 11:41-43, 17:1), and perhaps it was also a way of showing the man that God was the source of His power.<sup>843</sup> And with a deep sigh said to him: **Be opened!** A deaf person could easily lip-read this word. Immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly (Mk 7:33-35). He was in a new world, into which Jesus had put Him with only one Aramaic word: **Ephphatha.**

The Nazarene commanded them not to tell the other Jews in the community because, although most of the people had not made up their mind about Him, the Sanhedrin had already rejected Him. But the more He commanded them not to tell, the more they kept talking about it. They couldn't contain their joy. The Jewish people were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. The verb is in the perfect tense, showing their resolute convictions regarding our Lord. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mark 7:36-37). They all knew these were messianic miracles.

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up on a mountainside and sat down, which was the official teaching position of a rabbi (Matthew 15:29). He was still in the Gentile region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31). Great crowds of Gentiles came to Him. Among the people seeking help included the most seriously deformed. **The prohibition against miracles for Jewish masses, or the condition of healing on the basis of personal need and faith did not apply to Gentiles. The four drastic changes in Christ's ministry were for Jews only. The Gentiles had not rejected Jesus as the Messiah; it was only the Jews who claimed that He was demon possessed** (see Ek - [It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives Out Demons](#)). Thus, Gentiles brought the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet. The supernatural power of the Meshiach was once again evident as He healed them in great numbers. They did not arrive at the same time, and those who were healed moved away to make room for others. But at any given time He would have had hundreds of people crowding around Him (Matthew 15:30; Mark 8:1a).

It is not hard to imagine the cries for help that mingled with shouts of joy, as **some** came to **the Lord** diseased and deformed while **others** were leaving healthy and whole. **People** who were sick went away cured; **people** who came with only one functioning arm or leg went away with two; and **people** who came blind and deaf went away seeing and hearing. **People** who had never spoken a word were now shouting praises to **ADONAI**. **People** who had never walked a step in their lives were now jumping and running for joy. Can anyone who claims the gift of healing do this today? Anyway, it was not surprising that **the people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Isra'el (Matthew 15:31 NASB).**<sup>844</sup>

The multitudes were so large and the needs so great that **the healing** continued for several days. **Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus** used that situation as a teachable moment. He called His apostles to Him and said: **I have compassion for these people; they have already been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance (Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:1b-3).** Does that sound familiar? It should, because Yeshua said basically the same thing **when He had compassion on a large crowd of Jews following after Him (see Fn - Jesus Feeds the 5,000).**

It seems incredible to us today, but **the talmidim** had not learned this lesson yet. However judgmental we might be, we need to remember that they had not yet received **the Ruach HaKodesh** to guide and teach them (**John 14:15-27**). So to a certain extent, they still didn't have all the spiritual light they would have later. But **their** lapse of faith had happened before in Jewish history, even as the generation that walked through the Sea of Reeds (see my commentary on **Exodus Ci - The Waters Were Divided and the Israelites Went Through the Sea on Dry Land**), was soon complaining about **ADONAI's** lack of provision! But isn't it still human nature today to have a short memory when it comes to the reality of **God's** presence among us?<sup>845</sup>

**The Twelve** recognized the impossibility of acquiring food in that region to feed so many people. So they answered: **Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?** How quickly they had forgotten about the feeding of the 5,000! **Christ** asked them: **How many loaves do you have? Seven,** they replied: **and a few small fish.** What a coincidence, a little bread and few small fish again! **He told the crowd to sit down on the ground (Matthew 15:33-35; Mark 8:4-6a).** Because this multitude was almost as large as the previous one that was fed, it seems likely that **Messiah** also had this large gathering sit in groups of hundreds and fifties in order to simplify the distribution.

Then He took the seven loaves as well as a few small fish and gave thanks. He broke them and gave them to the Twelve to distribute to the people. As always, Yeshua's provision was more than sufficient: they all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the Twelve picked up seven large baskets of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about four thousand men, besides women and children and could have totaled as many as fifteen thousand people (Matthew 15:36-38; Mark 8:6b-9a).

The seven large baskets mentioned here are of a different type than the twelve baskets used in the feeding of the 5,000 Jews. The type of basket used at the previous feeding was a small Jewish container called a *kophinos*, used by a person when traveling to carry food for one or two meals. The baskets used in the Decapolis feeding, however, were *spuridas*, which were distinctly Gentile and quite large. They could even hold a grown man, and it was in such a basket that Rabbi Sha'ul was lowered through an opening in the wall at Damascus (Acts 9:25). As a result, those seven large baskets held considerably more food than the twelve small baskets used in the feeding of the Jews. Because this crowd had **nothing to eat for three days**, they would have consumed more than the other, which had been without food for only one day (Matthew 14:15).

Alfred Edersheim observed that, "the Lord ended each phase of His ministry with a feeding. He ended His Galilean ministry with the feeding of the five thousand. He ended His Gentile ministry with the feeding of the four thousand. And He ended the Judean ministry before His death on the cross with the feeding of His own talmidim in the upper room."<sup>846</sup>