

MARK

Week 4: Mark 6:30-9:13

How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group

Start with a prayer and read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

6:30-44/8:1-21: JESUS FEEDS 9,000+ PEOPLE

6:30-44: When the Twelve return, Mark calls them 'the apostles' – a Greek term for people who have been on an official mission. Jesus tries to make space for them to rest and share their news, but they are besieged by crowds of people.

Jesus aches with pity for the crowd. He sees them as leaderless and helpless—like lost sheep. First he feeds their hearts and minds with his teaching; then he feeds their bodies by miraculously creating bread and fish. Although there are only five loaves and two fish to begin with, there is enough for everyone—and twelve baskets of scraps left over.¹

8:1-21: Mark tells of a second occasion when Jesus feeds a large crowd. This time there are some 4,000 people who have been with Jesus for three days in the wilderness. They are hungry, and Jesus feeds them all from seven loaves and a few small fish.

Jesus gives thanks and breaks the bread just as he did before. The disciples assist with the distribution of the food, and everyone has plenty. There are seven large baskets of scraps left over.

Nobody really knows why Mark has included two similar stories. Some think that the numbers are important, but there is no agreement on what they might mean. One idea is that Jesus is feeding Gentiles, to match his earlier feeding of Jews. But Mark doesn't say this himself.

The Pharisees want Jesus to prove his identity by performing another miracle, but Jesus refuses. He never responds to demands for signs from heaven. Instead he looks for faith—and faith never asks for proof. Jesus is exasperated by their willful unbelief.

Meanwhile, the disciples haven't brought enough bread. Why carry loaves when they have the amazing conjuror Jesus with them? Jesus warns them against demanding signs. It is a form of unbelief, and unbelief spreads and spoils, like yeast in flour. Jesus had created bread to show he was the Son of God, not so that they needn't buy loaves any more. Both the Pharisees and the disciples are slow to understand the meaning of Jesus' miracles.²

¹ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 453–454.

² Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 455–457.

1. (6:33 ff) How did the disciples and Jesus differ in the way they viewed the crowd?
2. What emotions might have been expressed by the disciples in verse 37?
3. What would you feel as a disciple when you gathered the leftovers? What was the lesson to be learned?
4. How does the feeding in chapter 8 compare and contrast with that of 6:30-44?
5. In light of all the miracles Jesus had already done, why would the Pharisees “demand a sign from heaven”? How would they have responded if Jesus had provided one?
6. What is Jesus’ point in highlighting the numbers “12” and “7”? What should the disciples understand from these numbers?
7. Do you sometimes doubt Jesus’ ability to meet your needs? How so? In what areas are you still unsure about that?

9:1-13: THE TRANSFIGURATION

Peter, James and John are allowed to see Jesus as he really is, shining with heavenly light. They watch him as he talks with Moses and Elijah—two giants of the Old Testament. It was through Moses that God gave his people the law. Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. But Jesus is even greater than these heroes. As the cloud of God’s presence surrounds them, they hear a voice saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’

Peter wants the vision to last. He offers to make shelters by plaiting branches, as the Jews do for the Feast of Tabernacles. But the moment passes. Moses and Elijah return to heaven—leaving Jesus to resume his road to Jerusalem and the cross.

On the way down the mountain, the disciples ask Jesus about Elijah: will he come back to herald the Messiah? Jesus explains that John the Baptist did Elijah’s job—and the fate he suffered was a taste of what lies ahead for Jesus.³

1. What is the connection between 9:1 and this event?
2. What do you imagine this scene was like? What is the significance of Moses’ and Elijah’s presence? Of the voice? (see 1:11)? Why would this event be important for the disciples?
3. Where have you grasped a bit of Jesus’ glory in a special way?
4. How does the picture of a suffering Messiah shape your view of what the Christian life is all about?

³ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 458.