

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 12 February 2024

Greetings.

This past Wednesday marked the anniversary of the birth of the English novelist Charles Dickens on 7 February 1812.

Charles Dickens is generally considered the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His many volumes include 'David Copperfield', 'Oliver Twist', 'A Tale of Two Cities', 'Great Expectations', 'Martin Chuzzlewit' and (of special interest to me today) 'A Christmas Carol'.

The anniversary of Mr Dickens' birth reminds me of a series of three messages which I gave almost twenty years ago.

I set out below an updated and edited version of the notes of one of those three messages. The connection with Mr Dickens and his 'Christmas Carol' will be clear from the opening paragraph of these notes. (God willing, the notes of the other messages will form the bases of my 'Monday Musings' on some later occasions.)

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

LIVING IN THE PAST

SCRIPTURE

And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening'. Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah". And He left them and departed.

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees".

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread".

But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees".

Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 15. 39-16. 12 (*The New King James Version*).

INTRODUCTION

There is a section towards the end of Charles Dickens' novel, 'A Christmas Carol', in which the now reformed Ebenezer Scrooge scrambles out of bed, repeating the words, 'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future'. Although a rather unusual way in which to commence a biblical study, I believe that the words of the fictional Scrooge carry a very serious message for every believer.

For the present purpose, I want to home in on the words, 'Live in the past' and to begin by asking, 'What it doesn't mean for us, as Christians, to live in the past?'

WHAT LIVING IN THE PAST DOES NOT MEAN

1. Well, it certainly does not mean bewailing and mourning over (still less, moaning over) what we regard as better and happier days long since gone, as did some of the Jews at the laying of the foundation of the second Temple in the days of Ezra: 'many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice'.¹

Not that it is always a bad thing to recall better days. It often does us good to encourage ourselves by reviewing what God has wrought in the past. We could certainly do worse than to join the prophet Habakkuk in looking back on God's past working and to pray, 'Do again in our times the great deeds you used to do'.²

2. Nor does living in the past mean resting (certainly not smugly glorying) in what we have been and have accomplished and attained in the past—which it is likely that Paul had chiefly in mind in Philippians 3 when he writes, 'forgetting those things which are behind'.³

3. Nor does living in the past mean living a life of regret over past failures, which we cannot now rectify. Yes, I confess that I am disappointed that over the last 63 years I have loved God so little and sinned so much. Memories of the things which stain my past certainly serve to keep me from thinking too highly of myself. But I know that I cannot change them now and that I do myself no good in dwelling unduly on them.

4. Nor does living in the past mean resisting all and every kind of change—in any context. In the spiritual realm, we must always be careful to distinguish what the Bible actually says (which will never change) from our own human ideas, applications and traditions.

I recall hearing a recording of a message given by an elder of a church in Brighton in which he tells of a young girl who asks her mother (as I recall, a sister in the church where he is in fellowship) why it was she always cut the ends off the joint of meat and then put those end-pieces on top of the joint before she cooked it. Her mother admitted that she didn't really know, that she thought that perhaps this made the juices flow better but that, in truth, she did it simply because her mother always had.

Soon after, Gran paid a visit to their home and, as you might guess, the girl was quick to ask her why she did it. Rather taken aback at her granddaughter's question, Gran replied, "Your mother doesn't still do that, does she? I always did it when she was young because my old oven was too small to get a big joint into it!"

And, yes, it is all too possible for us to continue practices which once made very good sense but which are no longer really relevant ... although, I add, with no little feeling, we should avoid changing things just for the sake of change. Let me simply repeat that we always need to distinguish what Scripture says from the way we have applied it and done things in the past.

5. Finally (and most certainly), nor does living in the past mean nursing grievances and brooding over past upsets and what we regard as wrongs done to us by others. In most cases, by far, it is best to follow the procedure outlined by our Lord and to sort it out with the person we believe is guilty of having injured us.⁴

In what sense, then, should we live in the past?

WHAT LIVING IN THE PAST DOES MEAN

1. First, it is certainly healthy to remember what we once were (and would still be!) apart from God's saving grace and to be grateful to God that we are not still in that condition. I guess we could all do with a dose of Ephesians 2 verses 11-12: 'Remember that you' were 'once Gentiles in the flesh ... without Christ ... hope and ... God'.

We know that the man who says these words *never* forgot what *he* had been, making many references to it both in his preaching and in his correspondence.⁵ Indeed, it is towards the end of his life that he writes, 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me ... who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent, insolent man'.⁶ The apostle Paul never forgot what he had been and what he had done.

2. Second, it is always a good thing to learn from past mistakes, whether our own or those of others. One nineteenth-century German philosopher writes, 'What experience and history teach is this—that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it'.⁷ Alas, we often fare no better than those 'nations and governments' ... and perform no better than such notable Bible characters as Abraham (who *on more than one occasion* left the land to which he had been called by God and ended up half-lying about his relationship to his wife Sarah⁸) and Samson (who *on more than one occasion* revealed secrets to foreign women—to his cost⁹).

I observe from his words to Joab that King David had noted well the mistake of somebody else and had learned from it: 'Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?'¹⁰

Yes, we are meant to learn from past mistakes, whether our own or those of others.

3. But, in particular, it is important that we remember the difficult times and trials through which the Lord has brought us to date and to go forward in the confidence that the One who proved Himself faithful 'yesterday' is still the same 'today' and will still be the same tomorrow—and, indeed, 'forever'!¹¹

(i) REMEMBERING THE LORD'S PROVEN ABILITY TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT ME.

We do well to take a leaf out of David's book when he is about to face the great Philistine champion. At the time, King Saul regards the young volunteer's offer to tackle the seasoned warrior as wholly unrealistic: 'Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth"'.¹²

Listen carefully to young David's response: 'Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. Moreover, David said, The Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand ('paw' – same word) of this Philistine'.¹³ Note especially those words, 'The Lord who delivered me ... will deliver me'!

David may not have proved Saul's armour¹⁴ (and, therefore, much preferred to go down into the valley without it)¹⁵ but he had proved 'the living God' (and had no intention whatever of going down into the valley without Him)!

Nor should we underestimate David's exploits when defending his father's flock. He later writes of a lion 'greedy of his prey'.¹⁶ Make no mistake, David didn't get that out of a nature book; he learnt all about it at first-hand ... he had met at least one hungry lion! And David is most careful to give all the glory to God, freely acknowledging that, just as 'I ... delivered (the lamb) out of his mouth',¹⁷ so 'the Lord ... delivered me out of the paw of the lion'.¹⁸ And David was totally convinced that what God had done in the wilderness of Judah, he could—and would—do in the valley of Elah!

This is the reasoning of faith. What God has done before, He is able to do again.

Turning to the New Testament, we can compare Paul's expressed confidence when (looking back to a time in Asia when, on the verge of despair, he had seen himself as a condemned man under sentence of death) he writes, 'We trust not in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us'.¹⁹ And this confidence held firm to the very end of his days, for he writes immediately preceding his parting greetings in the last of his epistles which have come down to us, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work'.²⁰

I have so much to learn from David and Paul. My own past experiences of God's preserving care should sustain and buttress my faith in His care both in the present and for the future. Yes ... but do they?

And then I ask, what about, not only the occasions when the Lord has proved His ability to preserve and to protect me but the multiple occasions when the Lord has proved His ability to provide for me?

(ii) REMEMBERING THE LORD'S PROVEN ABILITY TO PROVIDE FOR ME.

Do I ever doubt the Lord's ability to meet my every need? Then let me recall the many past occasions when He did just that—when He provided for me, often in the most remarkable of ways.

The incident of the forgotten bread.

And this is where our opening Scripture reading comes in. For, in that passage, Jesus teaches His disciples to do just that: 'Do you not ... remember ...?'.²¹ That is the word we need to underline ... **'remember'**.

(a) The background.

The Lord and the disciples have crossed the Sea of Galilee and have now reached the other side of the lake.

But the disciples have forgotten to bring any bread with them.²² Well, actually, they did have one loaf²³ but that is so woefully inadequate as not even to merit mention when they discuss the meaning of the Lord's saying about the leaven. They therefore 'reasoned with one another because they had no bread'.²⁴ In some ways, it was a strange oversight on their part, given that they had recently been *handing out bread* to a crowd who otherwise would have had 'nothing to eat' and who would have gone hungry on their journey.²⁵ But that's life!

You and I know, of course, that, when Jesus speaks of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (together with that of the Herodians²⁶) He is referring to their teaching²⁷—using leaven as an object lesson to illustrate the insidious effect of that teaching, its tendency to spread and corrupt everything and everyone.

The three Jewish parties He mentions were very different, and, I guess, if we insist on distinguishing the effect of their teachings, we could attribute (i) *hypocrisy* to the Pharisees, (ii) *unbelief and scepticism* to the Sadducees and (iii) *worldliness and self-gratification* to the Herodians. But, in the context of our passage, they make common cause against Jesus—testing Him by demanding a sign from heaven.

This was nothing new; they had asked for exactly the same on a previous occasion.²⁸ It is possible that the reason behind their stipulation '*from heaven*' lay in an ancient Jewish superstition that, although demons and false gods could perform signs *on earth*, only God could perform signs *out of heaven* ... signs such as (so they held) the miraculous provision of manna in the days of Moses, the arresting of the sun in the days of Joshua, the control of thunder and rain in the days of Samuel and the shutting and opening of heaven in the days of Elijah. The so-called 'Epistle of Jeremiah' (a Jewish apocryphal book) says of the gods of Babylon, 'Neither can they shew signs in the heavens among the heathen'.²⁹

In truth, there was no shortage of miraculous signs to accredit and confirm the claims of Jesus but, as He points out to them, they were wilfully blind to these 'signs of the times', determined to reject Him and His message.³⁰

(b) The disciples' misunderstanding.

But, in our passage, the Lord has to contend not only with the hostility of unbelieving Jews but also with the painfully slow understanding of His own disciples, who have got hold of the wrong end of the stick and entirely misunderstand His meaning.

To them, the word 'leaven' naturally suggests bread and it was a short step in their minds to their failure to bring an adequate food supply with them.³¹ They therefore conclude that Jesus is directing His remark at their negligence—possibly, that He is getting at them because they would now have to rely on the likes of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians for something to eat.³²

(c) The Lord's reply.

1. Poor memories.

In His response, we can sense our Lord's disappointment in His disciples. According to Mark's account, He fires a barrage of no less than nine rapid questions,³³ including, 'Do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? ... when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?'³⁴

His concern is not that His disciples had forgotten bread (which they had³⁵) but that they had forgotten how He had sustained them (and many others) on previous occasions.³⁶ Their past experiences should have screamed out at them that a shortage of bread is no problem whatever to Him and that their literal interpretation of the word 'leaven' simply could not be right.

The Lord is compelled to jog their memories He points out, in effect, that One (i) who had miraculously multiplied first five and then seven loaves to feed first 5,000 and then 4,000 men respectively and (ii) who had then filled first twelve baskets and then seven large baskets³⁷ respectively with the remaining fragments, could surely satisfy the appetite of thirteen men from one loaf. Indeed, even applying the smaller of the two ratios (of seven loaves to 4,000 men) one loaf alone could have fed 570 men ... and there would have been enough fragments left over to fill a large basket.

And there weren't 570 of them!

I note that it was the One who Himself had once experienced very real pangs of hunger Himself when He had fasted for forty days in the wilderness in Matthew 4³⁸ who tells His disciples before feeding 4,000 men plus women and children in chapter 15, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry'.³⁹ Yes, He knew all about being 'hungry'!⁴⁰

And so, yes, the Lord does take the disciples to task for their 'forgetfulness' but it is not the forgetfulness of verse 5; it is for the forgetfulness of verses 9-10! His concern does **not** lie in the food which they failed to provide in the present but in the food He had successfully provided in the past!

2. Little faith.

The Saviour traces their difficulty to its root cause—to the weakness of their faith: 'O you of little faith', He says.⁴¹

He rebukes them, **not** because they had little bread in their boat but because they have little faith in their heart. True, they may not have brought sufficient food with them but they have the *All-Sufficient One* with them, who had, more than once, proved His ability to meet some simply incredible needs.

According to Mark, Jesus had asked the same question before both of the miraculous feedings; namely, 'How many loaves have you?'⁴² Now, again according to Mark's account, He wants to know concerning both feedings, 'How many baskets full of fragments did you take up?'⁴³ That is, He wants His disciples to remember not only that He had provided sufficient food for large multitudes with very meagre resources but also that there had been enough and to spare—that many baskets had been filled with fragments.⁴⁴

3. Sluggish understanding.

I note that the disciples are able to tell the Lord the exact number of baskets or hand baskets which they had filled on both occasions; namely, twelve and seven respectively. When prompted, that is, they can recall the precise details of both incidents. Not that this is surprising because, after all, they had been active participants.

And yet, alas, although they had been personally involved, the spiritual lesson of the past had been completely lost on them. Hence the Lord's question, 'Do you not yet understand?'⁴⁵

He then further asks, 'Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?'⁴⁶ the disciples, that is, *possessed* the organs and wherewithal necessary to learn and to understand but they *did not use* them.

I doubt it is a coincidence that, in the Gospel according to Mark, this particular incident is sandwiched between the accounts of two miracles⁴⁷ where: (i) men were brought to Jesus, (ii) Jesus took the men aside, (iii) Jesus used both His spittle and His touch and, more to the point, (iv) He opened the ears of the one man⁴⁸ and the eyes of the other,⁴⁹ 'Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?' The disciples have both ears and eyes ... let them use them!

(d) The sequel.

Matthew closes his account of the incident by assuring his readers that he and his fellow disciples finally got the point, coming to understand that the Lord had spoken, not about leaven which is found in bread but about the corrupting teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.⁵⁰

Following His pointed questions, the disciples now realise that the miraculous feeding of the multitudes by the Lord Jesus in the past carried the clear implication that, to Him, the provision of their food in the present could never pose a problem. And yet they still fail to grasp the deeper significance of the feeding of a multitude; namely, that it also speaks volumes about His Person—that He was the Son of God.

We read that, following the occasion when He walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee and caused the contrary wind to cease, 'they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marvelled for they had not understood about the loaves'.⁵¹ Had the disciples 'understood about the loaves', nothing about Him and His power over nature would have surprised them!

CONCLUSION

My future is unknown to me. For all I know, I may soon be facing bigger changes and challenges than I have programmed in for the next few months and years—whether disappointments, failing health, sudden and unexpected bereavement, family problems, setbacks in assembly life or whatever. I have no way of knowing.

Frankly, my 'doom and gloom' list is virtually endless and, unless I am careful, I could easily scan it with considerable apprehension and anxiety. But I know that, when I consider my unknown future, the Lord wants me to take account of how He has proved Himself on my behalf many times in the past.

We each have our own special, personal and unique history and few, if any, of us haven't been through some trying circumstances in which the hand of God has made evident and in which God has proved Himself to us.

I have in my home a set of old volumes entitled, '*A Narrative of some of the Lord's dealings with George Muller, written by himself*', dated 1881. These old books make fascinating (and encouraging) reading. I can tell you that '*The Lord's dealings with Malcolm*' (if they were ever to be written—by me or by someone else) would make far less exciting reading ... but I can also tell you that, for all that, they are no less real.

So why, I ask myself, when some new crisis arises, do I wring my hands, crying out, 'What am I going to do? How am I going to cope?' Why do I insist on facing each fresh problem or crisis as if it was the very first that I have ever faced—as if the Lord had never intervened to meet my need before?

We would each do well today to recall our past blessings, our past deliverances and the past provision which the Lord has made for us and, with these in mind, to exclaim with Joseph Hart, 'I'll praise Him for all that is past and trust Him for all that's to come'.⁵²

With an eye then to the name 'Eben-ezer' (but this time having nothing to do with Dickens' 'Ebenezer Scrooge'), I will ask the prophet Samuel to close our meditation for us: Thus far the Lord has helped us!⁵³

Notes

¹ Ezra 3. 12.

² Hab. 3. 2 (*Good News Bible*); cf. Isa. 51. 9.

³ Phil. 3. 13.

(i) The apostle certainly does *not* mean that he set out to forget *all* past events in his life and to put them all behind him. He never forgot, for instance, (i) his upbringing, Acts 22. 3; 26. 5; 2 Cor. 11. 22; Gal. 1. 14, (ii) his sufferings as an apostle, 2 Cor. 11. 23-33, nor (iii) his pre-conversion persecution of the church, Acts 22. 4-5; 26. 9-11; 1 Cor. 15. 9; Gal. 1. 13; 1 Tim. 1. 13 (references to the latter spanning from one of his earliest letters – Galatians – to one of his last – 1 Timothy).

(ii) 'Forgetting what is behind is a glance at the apostle's past life, whether in regard to his Jewish prerogatives which are enumerated in verses 5–6, or in reference to his past experiences as a Christian, the successes and failures, triumphs and miseries which came to him as an apostle. In support of the first alternative is the awareness we have detected in verse 8 that the tendency to revert to 'confidence in the flesh' would, if he should yield to it, only impede his progress', R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: Tyndale Commentary*, page 153.

(iii) 'There is a sinful forgetting of past sins and past mercies, which ought to be remembered for the exercise of constant repentance and thankfulness to God. But Paul forgot the things which were behind so as not to be content with present measures of grace: he was still for having more and more', Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, comments on Phil. 3. 9-14.

(iv) 'He is forgetting the things which are behind. That is to say, he will never glory in any of his achievements or use them as an excuse for relaxation. In effect, Paul is saying that the Christian must forget all that he has done and remember only what he has still to do. In the Christian life, there is no room for a person who desires to rest upon his laurels. He is also reaching out for the things which are in front. The word he uses for reaching out is very vivid and is used of a racer going hard for the tape. It describes him with eyes for nothing but the goal. It describes the man who is going flat out for the finish. So, Paul says that in the Christian life, we must forget every past achievement and remember only the goal which lies ahead', William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, page 82.

(v) 'He speaks of himself as a runner with but one object in view: to finish the race and win the prize. A competitor in a race does not look over his or her shoulder to see how much ground has been covered already or how rivals are getting on: the runner keeps eyes fixed on the winning post. What is behind is that part of the race that has been completed so far', F. F. Bruce, *Philippians: New International Biblical Commentary*, page 121.

(vi) 'Not to be understood as if Paul were ashamed of what lay behind him in his Christian career, or as if he did not emphasise it as exhibiting the grace of God ... Rather that he does not use the memory of what God has wrought in him and through him to encourage self-satisfaction and relaxation of effort. He is stimulated by the past to renewed energy in Christian self-development and in the building-up of Christ's church', M. R. Vincent, *Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon: International Critical Commentary*, page 109.

(vii) 'Memory is a precious gift. To look back can be sinful; but it can also be sensible. To look back with lustful eyes, as Lot's wife did, to the sins of Sodom from which we have been delivered, is to court disaster. To look back wistfully to the easy-going comforts of the world once we have put our hands to the plough is to be unfit for the kingdom of God. But to look back along the way that God has led us is the least that gratitude can do, and to look back to the spiritual heights which once by the grace of God we occupied is to take the first step along the road of repentance', J. R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, page 30.

⁴ Matt. 18. 15-17; Luke 17. 3-4; cf. Lev. 19. 17

⁵ For example, Acts 22. 4-5; 26. 9-11; 1 Cor. 15. 9 and Gal. 1. 13.

⁶ 1 Tim. 1. 13.

⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, page 8.

⁸ Gen. 12. 10-15; 20. 1-2.

⁹ Judg. 14. 16-18; 16. 16-21.

¹⁰ 2 Sam. 11. 21.

¹¹ Cf. Heb. 13. 8.

¹² 1 Sam. 17. 33.

¹³ 1 Sam. 17. 34-37.

¹⁴ The word translated 'armour' can be used to describe any kind of garment, tunic or clothing (see, for instance, its use for the 'garment' of a priest, Lev. 6. 10, and 'clothes' which could be rent, 1 Sam. 4. 12.). Here, however, linked with helmet and coat of mail, it signifies either 'tunic' or 'armour' (the same word is translated 'garments' and associated with weapons of war in the next chapter; 'And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle', 1 Sam. 18. 4).

It seems highly unlikely to me that this clothing and equipment was Saul's personal clothing and equipment. Apart from any other considerations, it is most unlikely that the king would have stripped himself of his own armour on the field of battle. Again, Saul, as a man who 'from his shoulders and upward' was 'higher than any of the people, 1 Sam. 9. 2, would have known that his own armour and weapons would have been far too big to be of any use to 'a youth', 1 Sam. 17. 33, like David, who, because of his age, was clearly much smaller than Eliab and his other brothers, 1 Sam. 16. 6-12. Yet again, when declining to take the proffered items, David made no reference to any of them being too big for him—only that he wasn't used to them. I think it far more likely that the military clothing and equipment came from Saul's armoury and that, in that sense, it was spoken of as 'his'.

¹⁵ 1 Sam. 17. 38-39.

¹⁶ Psa. 17. 12.

¹⁷ 1 Sam. 17. 35.

¹⁸ 1 Sam. 17. 37.

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 1. 9-10.

²⁰ 2 Tim. 4. 17-18.

²¹ Matt. 16. 9.

²² Matt. 16. 5.

²³ Mark 8. 14.

²⁴ Mark 8. 16.

²⁵ Mark 8. 2-3.

²⁶ Mark 8. 15.

²⁷ Matt. 16. 12.

²⁸ Matt. 12. 38.

²⁹ 'In the Jewish superstition it was held that demons and false gods could give signs on earth, but only the true God signs from heaven. In the apocryphal Epistle of Jeremiah, 16:67, we read of the gods of the heathen, 'σημεῖά τε ἐν ἔθνεσιν ἐν οὐρανῶν οὐ μὴ δεῖξωσιν'.... And for such a notion they alleged the bread from heaven given by Moses (see John 6. 31), the staying of the sun by Joshua (Josh. 10. 12), the thunder and rain by Samuel (1 Sam. 12. 17, compare Jer. 14. 22), and Elijah (James 5. 17-18)', H. Alford, 'Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary', Volume 1, page 168.

³⁰ Matt. 16. 3.

'The account ... paints a telling picture of sad men who, professing to want evidence, in fact refuse to see the proofs right in front of their noses', W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, 'A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew', Volume II, page 284.

³¹ Matt. 16. 7.

³² Such a construction was sad for several reasons, not least that they should have known Him better than to believe He could ever have been so petty and small-minded.

³³ '(i) Why do you reason because you have no bread? (ii) Do you not yet perceive nor understand? (iii) Is your heart still hardened? (iv) Having eyes, do you not see? (v) And having ears, do you not hear? (vi) And do you not remember? (vii) When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? ... (viii) Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? ... (ix) How is it you do not understand?', Mark 8. 17-21.

³⁴ The two miraculous feeding incidents followed the same general pattern:

- (1) Both occurred in a desert place.
- (2) In both instances, there were many people—'about 5,000 men ... about 4, 000 men'.
- (3) On both occasions, our Lord was with His disciples, presumably the Twelve.
- (4) In both cases, there was an inadequate supply of food available.
- (5) On both occasions, Jesus 'had compassion'.
- (6) Both times the people were commanded to recline.
- (7) On both occasions, He gave thanks, broke and handed out food through the disciples.
- (8) Both times, 'they did eat, and were filled'.
- (9) On both occasions, there was more than enough food for all with leftover portions to be gathered up.
- (10) On both occasions, He then sent away the crowd.

Yet there are a number of differences in the two miracles.

Matt 14. 13-21; Mark 6. 30-44 **Matt 15. 32-39; Mark 8. 1-10**

There were 5,000 men plus women and children. There were 4,000 men plus women and children.

The multitude had been with the Lord one day. The multitude had been with the Lord three days.

The disciples were instructed to go and see what supplies were available. The disciples knew, when they were asked, what supplies were available.

There were five loaves and two fish. There were seven loaves and a few fish.

The multitude was instructed to sit 'upon the green grass' – indicating springtime. The multitude was instructed to sit 'on the ground (literally, 'the soil')' – suggesting late summer.

Jesus blessed the loaves. Jesus gave thanks for the loaves and later blessed the fish.

There were twelve baskets filled with fragments.

The multitude was fed on the day they came to Jesus. Having travelled only a short distance, they would have carried lunch baskets. There were seven baskets filled with fragments. The words of 'baskets' differ and it is possible that the basket of Mark 8 is larger; it is the word used in Acts 9. 25; 2 Cor. 11. 33 – large enough to accommodate a man.

The four thousand were with Jesus for three days and some of them had come from far away, Mark 8. 2-3. The baskets they had with them may well have been sizeable hampers.

The data above has been amended from a note in my original document. The original was undoubtedly based on some other source. I have, however, been unable to trace that source and, therefore, unable to attribute it properly.

³⁵ Matt. 16. 5; Mark 8. 5.

³⁶ Compare, 'you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness', Deut. 8. 2.

³⁷ See the last not in the table in note 34 above.

³⁸ Matt. 4. 2.

³⁹ Matt. 15. 32.

⁴⁰ Matt. 4. 2.

⁴¹ Matt. 16. 8.

⁴² Mark 6. 38; 8. 5.

⁴³ Mark 8. 19, 20.

⁴⁴ With 'fragments', I note; not with 'crumbs', being an entirely different word from that used by the Syrophenician/Canaanite woman: 'the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table', Matt. 15. 27.

⁴⁵ Matt. 16. 9.

'Jesus' concluding question—"How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread?"—makes everything clear: leaven is not to be understood literally. Thus, Jesus can restate his warning without any possibility of being misunderstood: "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees*", W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *ibid.*, page 290.

⁴⁶ Mark 8. 18.

⁴⁷ Mark 7. 31-37; 8. 22-26.

Both miracles 'concern healings that figure in Isa. 35. 5-6', C. E. B. Cranfield, '*The Gospel according to Saint Mark*', page 254.

⁴⁸ Mark 7. 35.

⁴⁹ Mark 8. 23-25.

⁵⁰ Matt. 16. 12.

⁵¹ Mark 6. 47-52.

Mark 6. 52 'explains their utter astonishment. They had not understood about the loaves: though they must have realized that a miracle had been wrought, they had not grasped its significance as a pointer to the secret of Jesus' person', C. E. B. Cranfield, *ibid.*, page 227.

⁵² The hymn, '*How Good is the God we Adore*'.

⁵³ 1 Sam. 7. 12.