

Matthew 16a

As Jesus returned to Israel, He was again confronted by the religious leaders...the Pharisees and Sadducees. What did they ask Him for (v. 1)? They were asking for their own personal, private miracle apparently to be entertained and/or for further proof that He was who He claimed to be. The Pharisees and Sadducees have always been perennial political and theological enemies.....but now they have discovered a common enemy which united them and drew them together in a common mission.

How did Jesus respond to their outlandish request (vv. 2-5)? He called them a wicked and adulterous generation (cf. 12:39). They were careful observers of *weather signs* and could forecast whether the weather would be good or threatening. Yet they had been surrounded by *spiritual signs* relating to the person of Jesus Christ and had missed them all. Such a wicked generation would not receive any special treatment. The only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah, which He had previously given them (12:38-42).¹

What were "the signs of the times" that Israel's religious leaders failed to see (v. 3)? John the Baptist's appearance and preaching were two signs fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of Messiah's forerunner (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1-12). Jesus' miracles and teaching were another sign that the King had arrived (12:28). Also, the fulfillment of various Old Testament Messianic prophecies such as Micah 5:2 and Zechariah 9:9.

What did Jesus warn His disciples about (v. 6)? He warned them against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Yeast, or "Leaven," is often used as an illustration of something small that inevitably spreads and has a large effect (cf. 13:33). Here it stands for the spread of something evil (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).²

What did the disciples think about His warning (v. 7)? Jesus' mention of yeast caused the disciples to think He was referring to their having forgotten to bring along bread.

How did Jesus respond to their errant thinking (vv. 8-11)? Jesus explained that He was not referring to their lack of bread. He reminded them of the two previous miracles when He had multiplied loaves and fish, and food was left over (Matthew 14:13-21; 15:29-38). Because they didn't trust Him to provide on those two occasions, they were, He said, "of little faith." He then simply repeated His warning: "*Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*" Their teaching was like pervasive yeast, penetrating and corrupting the nation.³

When they arrived at Caesarea Philippi, what did Jesus ask His disciples (v. 13)? "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*"

How did they answer (v. 14)? Their replies were all flattering, for people were identifying Jesus with John the Baptist ... Elijah ... Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. All these answers, of course, were wrong. It is interesting that no one suggested that he might be the Messiah.

What follow up question did Jesus ask the disciples (v. 15)? "*But what about you? Who do you say I am?*"

What was their answer (v. 16)? Speaking for the disciples, Peter spoke his now-famous words, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" In other words, He was Israel's Messiah and God the Son.

How did Jesus respond to Peter's observation (v. 17)? Peter was blessed because he had come to a correct conclusion about the person of Christ. The Lord added, however, this was not a conclusion Peter had reached by his own intellect or perception. God, the Father in heaven, had supernaturally revealed it to him.....as He still does today.⁴

What did Jesus mean by v. 18? After Jesus declares that God the Father had revealed the truth to Peter, He says, “*You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.*” The Greek word for “Peter,” *Petros*, is a masculine noun that means “a detached stone, a stone that might be thrown or easily moved” (Zodhiates, S., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, AMG Publishers, 1992, p. 1,154). The word for “rock” next mentioned is a different Greek word, *petra*, a feminine noun that means “a mass of rock” or “a cliff” and therefore something foundational (ibid.; see also [Matthew 7:24–25](#)).

The difference in the two terms may suggest that Jesus was contrasting Peter with Himself. So, Jesus’ words are best interpreted as a simple play on words. That is, Jesus was saying, “You are the small rock, but I am the massive rock, the foundation of the church.” This view finds support in other passages that present Christ, not Peter, as the foundation of the church ([1 Corinthians 3:11](#)) and the life-giving rock ([1 Corinthians 10:4](#)).

What did Jesus mean by the statement that “....the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (v. 18)? Jesus apparently meant that the powers of death -- Satan, and his minions -- doing their most powerful work of opposing life— would *not* prevail over the church. The church cannot die. Even Jesus’ death would not prevent Him from building the church. Jesus’ church would be a living church, just as Yahweh was the living God (cf. v. 16).⁵

What did Jesus mean by v. 19? Keys can be used to lock doors as well as open them. The specific doors Jesus has in mind in this passage are the doors to the Kingdom of Heaven. Preaching the gospel would be the means of opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers and shutting it against unbelievers. By his sermon on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:14–40](#)), Peter opened the door of the kingdom for the first time.

Without faith in Christ, the door to heaven is shut and barred (see [John 3:18](#)). As the apostles preached the gospel, those who responded in faith and repentance were granted access to the Kingdom of Heaven; yet those who continued to harden their hearts and reject the gospel of God’s saving grace were shut out of the Kingdom ([Acts 8:23](#)).

The ability to bind and loose were not given to usurp Christ’s authority over individual believers and their eternal destiny, but authority to announce, guilt or innocence; to declare something forbidden or to declare it allowed, which included the authority to exercise church discipline. These were decisions Peter was to implement as he received instruction from heaven. Peter simply carried out God’s directions.

This privilege of binding and loosing was seen in Peter’s life as he had the privilege on the day of Pentecost to proclaim the gospel and announce to all those who responded in saving faith that their sins had been forgiven ([Acts 2](#)). He was able to do the same thing with the household of Cornelius ([Acts 10–11](#); cf. [Acts 15:19–20](#)). The same privilege was given all the disciples ([John 20:22–23](#)).⁶

Why did Jesus command His disciples to tell no one that He was the Messiah (v. 20)? Jesus wanted His disciples to keep a “messianic secret,” namely, that He was the Messiah. Jesus was not trying to conceal His true identity, but He was controlling how people would respond to Him (cf. [12:38–39](#); [16:4](#)). If the disciples had broadcast the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, some people would have tried to draft Him as a political liberator/king; such an ill-timed move would be ruthlessly crushed by the Romans. But Jesus wanted people to come to believe in Him because of the words that He spoke and the works that He performed (cf. [11:4](#), [25–26](#)).⁷

¹ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 56.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 424.

³ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 56–57.

⁴ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 57.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 435.

⁶ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 58.

⁷ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 441.