

Jesus Feeds the 5,000

Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13

DIG: Why did Christ withdraw? How did He react to the interruption? What sensitivity did the apostles show initially? How did the talmidim and Jesus differ in how they viewed the situation? How might they have felt after Yeshua's statement in Matthew 14:16? What tone of voice do you hear in Luke 9:13? How did Christ test Philip? How might the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11) be a factor in this test? From their responses, what grades would you give to Philip and Andrew? What was their likely reaction after the miracle? What is the lesson of the story?

REFLECT: What problems in your life seem to have no solutions? How have you seen the Lord stretch your resources beyond what you could imagine? How do you need to trust Him right now? How do you think ADONAI wants you to deal with your doubts? In what ways are you like Philip and Andrew, failing to remember something about Yeshua when faced with a difficult situation? How has Jesus "fed" you when you've been spiritually hungry lately? What does this story teach you about the way God provides for His people? In what ways has Ha'Shem given you wisdom and strength to overcome difficulties in your life? How does the faith of other believers inspire us to trust God?

On returning from preaching the Good News of the Kingdom the twelve apostles gave glowing reports to Christ of their missionary excursion. When the apostles returned (see Fk - **Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Apostles**), they reported to Yeshua all that they had done and taught. It was a joyous occasion, except they had to tell the Master about the death of His Forerunner (see Fl - **John the Baptist is Beheaded**). Many of John's disciples were seething about his execution and would have liked nothing better than for someone to rise up and avenge the death of their prophet. Who would be a better candidate than Jesus? Perhaps this hope was running through their heads.

At any rate, their reunion did not last very long. Once word got out where they were, the multitudes were gathering again with their sick to be healed. So many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. The only way to get a little rest and a chance to quietly talk over the campaign (pointing out the practical lessons of those experiences to His talmidim) was to get away. He said to them: **Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest** (Mark 6:30-31; Luke 9:10a).

Then Jesus took them with Him and they withdrew privately by boat to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee - sometimes called the Sea of Tiberias because of the city of the same name, the capital of the tetrarchy - to a town called Bethsaida Julias (Mattityahu 14:13a; Mark 6:32; Luke 9:10b; John 6:1). It lay on the north end of the Lake across the Jordan from Herod's jurisdiction. There was a fertile, but sparsely populated plain, to the south of the town where there were grassy slopes.⁷⁸⁷

But when the Lord and the Twelve departed, a great crowd of people saw them leaving, recognized them, and followed Him on foot by the land route to the north of the lake because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. This route crossed a ford some two miles above where the river enters the Sea of Galilee.

In a frenzy, there were others who heard of His departure, and the multitudes from various cities ran and got there ahead of them (Matthew 14:13b; Mark 6:33; Luke 9:11a; John 6:2). What a picture. If someone had the gift of healing today, would we not see the same thing? With our worldwide communication capabilities, would it not be seen all over the world? John notes that the Jewish Passover Festival was near (John 6:4). This is the third of four Passovers mentioned in the ministry of Christ. The first is mentioned in John 2:13. The second is in John 5:1, while the third is referred to here, in John 6:4, and the fourth in John 11:55, 12:1, 13:1, 18:28 and 39, and 19:14. By dating these, we are able to conclude that His public ministry lasted three-and-a-half years.⁷⁸⁸

Pesach was exactly when Isra'el expected the Messiah to come, and they were looking for the messianic banquet as an inauguration of the kingdom of God. We see this from the writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls and apocalyptic literature of Judaism. This was the third Passover of His public ministry. That means it was two-and-a-half years since His public ministry had begun (see Bs - [Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple](#)). It also marks the beginning of His final year of ministry. He will be crucified the following Passover.

Before the large crowd had arrived Jesus went up on a mountainside, better translated *the hill country*, and sat down with His apostles (John 6:3). It was not wilderness or desert. We are told below that they would be seated on the green grass. It was simply an uninhabited place near villages. However, Yeshua still couldn't escape the multitudes. The Lord knew the overwhelming majority sought Him for selfish reasons and nothing more; even so, unlike His talmidim, He felt compassion for them even when they became a nuisance.

When Jesus landed on the shore of Bethsaida Julias, He left the Sea of Galilee and stepped into a sea of humanity. Keep in mind; He had crossed the sea to get away from the crowds. He had recently been rejected by the nation of Isra'el (see EK - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, That This Fellow Drives out Demons**), and He needed to grieve. The Lord longed to relax with His talmidim. He needed anything but another large crowd of thousands to teach and heal. But His love for people overcame His need for rest.

But the time with His apostles was soon cut short. When the miracle-working Rabbi looked up He saw the large crowd and He had compassion on them (Matthew 14:14a; Mark 6:34a). The Greek word for compassion is *splanchnizomai*, which won't mean much to you unless you are in the health profession and studied "splanchnology" in school. If so, you remember that "splanchnology" is the study of . . . the gut. When Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion on the large crowd, He is not saying that Jesus felt pity for them. No, the term is far more graphic. Matthew is saying that Christ felt their hurt in His gut.

He felt the limp of the crippled.

He felt the hurt of the diseased.

He felt the loneliness of the leper.

He felt the embarrassment of the sinful.

And once He felt their hurts, He couldn't help but heal them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.⁷⁸⁹ The question among them was, "Should we follow the old shepherds (the Pharisees and Sadducees), or the new one" (Yeshua ha-Mashiach)? Their indecision made them like sheep without a Shepherd (Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel 34:5). What did our Lord mean by that?

Sheep without a shepherd cannot find their way. Life can be so bewildering. We can stand at some crossroads of life and not know what way to go. It is only when Messiah leads that we can find the way by following Him.

Sheep without a shepherd cannot find their pasture and their food. We need the strength that can keep us going; we need the inspiration that can lift us out and above ourselves. When we seek it elsewhere our minds are still unsatisfied, our hearts are still restless, our souls are still unfed. We can only gain strength for life from Him who is the living bread.

Sheep without a shepherd have no defense against the dangers that threaten them. Sheep cannot defend themselves from thieves or wild beasts. If life has taught us one thing it must be that we cannot live it alone. We cannot defend ourselves from the temptations that assault us, and the evil that attacks us. Only in the company of **Jesus** can we walk in the world and be holy vessels. Without **Him** we are defenseless; with **Him** we are safe.⁷⁹⁰

Jesus welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. He healed all those who needed healing on the basis of individual need and a demonstration of faith (see **En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry**). Most of **them** probably had to be carried or helped along by relatives or friends, and arrived many hours after the rest of **the crowd**. **And He began teaching them many things (Matthew 14:14b; Mark 6:34b; Luke 9:11b).** **The crowd**, tired of the powerless teaching of pharisaic Judaism, sensed a new type of teaching and was eager to hear **their** new **Rabbi**. Once again, those of faith would understand **Him** and those without trust would not.

The sun had passed its meridian and the shadows fell longer on **the great crowd**. **As evening approached, the apostles came to Him** and said: **It's already getting late and sunset is approaching (Mark 6:35). Send the crowds away, so they can go to the surrounding countryside to buy food and lodging because we are in a remote place here (Matthew 14:15; Mark 6:36; Luke 9:12).** **Here as a teachable moment. The purpose of this miracle would primarily be for the instruction of the apostles, although the masses would benefit from the food, the teaching and the healings.**

But surprisingly, the Lord replied: **They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37a; Luke 9:13a).** The word **You** in the Greek is intensive. **Messiah** really said: **As for you, you give them something to eat.** His continual training of **the Twelve** shows that what was about to happen was primarily intended for them. But then **the Master** specifically turned **His** attention to **Philip**. We know from our first introduction to **him** (**Bp - John's Disciples Follow Jesus**) that **he** was a student of the TaNaKh and interpreted it literally and believed in **the Messiah**. So when **Christ** came to **him** and said: **Follow Me**, **he** embraced **Jesus** immediately and followed **Him** without hesitation. That was **Philip's** spiritual side. **His** heart was in the right place. **He** was a man of faith. But sometimes **he** was a man of *weak* faith.

Then **Jesus** said to **Philip**: **Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat (John 6:5)?** Why did the master Teacher single out **Philip**? **John** tells us that **Yeshua** asked this only to test him, for **He** already had in mind what **He** was going to do (**John 6:6**). **Philip** was apparently the apostolic bean counter, the one who was always concerned with

organization and protocol. **He** was the type of person who in every meeting says, "I don't think we can do that." So **the Lord** was **testing him** to take a look at **himself** and see what **he** was really like - the master of the impossible.

Of course, the **Lord** knew exactly what **Philip** was thinking. **Philip** had probably already started counting heads. When **the great crowd** started moving in, **he** was already doing estimates. It was late in the day . . . this was **a huge crowd** . . . they were going to get hungry . . . no McDonald's around. So by the time **Messiah** asked the question, **Philip** already had **his** calculations prepared, "**It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for all of them to eat (Mark 6:37b; John 6:7)! All Philip could see was how impossible it was.**

But **Philip** had been there when **the miracle-working Rabbi** created wine out of water (**John 2:1-11**). **He** had already seen **Jesus** heal people numerous times. But when **Philip** saw the crowd, **he** began to feel overwhelmed by the impossible. **He** was too practical to think outside the box. The reality of the raw facts clouded **his** faith. The limitless supernatural power of **Christ** had completely escaped **his** thinking. Even **Andrew's** faith (as seen below) was challenged by the immense size of the logistical problem. But **Philip** lost the opportunity to see **his** faith rewarded, while **Andrew's** meager faith was rewarded. **Philip** needed to learn to set aside **his** pragmatic concerns and take hold of the supernatural potential of faith.⁷⁹¹

How many loaves do you have? He asked. Go and see.

The feeding of **the hundred** in the **Second Kings 4:42-44** foreshadowed the feeding of **the five thousand** here. A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of **God** twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. When **Elisha** said, "Give it to the people to eat," his servant asked, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" But **Elisha** answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what **ADONAI** says, "They will eat and have some left over." Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the **LORD**." The servant obeyed and **God** multiplied the food as **He** had promised. This miracle instructed all who heard of it that **Ha-Shem** could multiply the limited resources (**1 Kings 17:7-16**) that were dedicated to **Him** and with them nourish and sustain a large multitude.⁷⁹²

Then, one of **the Twelve**, **Andrew**, **Simon Peter's brother**, spoke up saying: **Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many (Matthew 14:17; Mark 6:38; Luke 9:13b; John 6:8-9)?** Of course, even **Andrew** knew that **five barley loaves and two small fish** would not be enough to feed **five thousand**

people, but (in his typical fashion) he brought the boy to Jesus anyway. Yeshua commanded it and Andrew did the best he could. He found the only source of food available, and he made sure that Messiah knew about it. Something in him seemed to understand that no gift is insignificant in the hands of the miracle-working Rabbi.⁷⁹³

Bring them here to Me, Jesus said (Matthew 14:18). Then He said to His apostles: **Have the people sit down**. The Twelve did so, and everyone was seated on the green grass in groups of hundreds and fifties, arranged like guests at a table (Mark 6:39-40; Luke 9:14b-15; John 6:10a). The Greek actual word for seated is *anaklino*, the word used of a person reclining on a couch at a banquet. It is the traditional position of free people (non-slaves) relaxing.

In traditional fashion, Christ took the provisions and made a b'rakhah or *blessing*. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven (the prayer is to bless God who had provided the meal), Yeshua gave thanks and broke the loaves (Matthew 14:19a; Mark 6:41a; Luke 9:16a; Jn 6:11a). Since this was a blessing over bread (symbolic of the main course of a meal), the Lord probably chanted the Motzi, "Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth" or *Barukh atah ADONAI, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz*. In the Talmud it is stated, "A man is forbidden to taste anything before saying a blessing over it" (Tractate Berachot 6:1). It is interesting to note that this is a very traditional way of sharing the bread, tearing it by hand rather than cutting it with a knife. The tearing is symbolic of the day when there will be no longer a nation lifting up sword against nation (Isaiah 2:4).⁷⁹⁴

Then He gave them to the talmidim to distribute to the people (Matthew 14:19b; Mark 6:41b; Luke 9:16b). The word gave is in the imperfect tense and continuous action. They kept on giving the bread and fish to the people. As to how the miracle was performed, the Bible gives no hint. All we know is that they all ate and were satisfied (Matthew 14:20a; Mark 6:42; Luke 9:17a).

When they all had enough to eat, He said to His apostles: **Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted** (John 6:11b-12). So they gathered them and filled twelve basketfuls of bread and fish left over by those who had eaten (Matthew 14:20b; Mark 6:43; Luke 9:17b; John 6:13). According to halakhah, destruction of food is prohibited (Shabbat 50b, 147b), except if the crumbs were smaller than an olive (B'rakhot 52b). These baskets were small wicker baskets (Greek: *kophinon*) every Jew took with him when he was away from home. He carried his lunch and some needed essentials in it so he would not have to eat defiled Gentile food.⁷⁹⁵

The number of the men who ate was about five thousand. The word for **men** here is not *anthropos*, the generic term that could include **men** and women, but *aner*, the word for an individual man. **Five thousand** is no doubt a round figure, not counting the women and children who were present. If they were counted the total might have been around twenty thousand people (**Matthew 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14a; John 6:10b**). This is the fourth of **Jesus'** seven miracles in the **John's** book (**John 2:1-11; 4:43-54; 5:1-15; 6:16-21; 9:1-34; 11:1-44**).

This is an extremely unique miracle. It is the only miracle recorded by all four Gospel writers with the exception of the resurrection. Of course, **Jesus** didn't even need to have that **boy's** lunch in order to feed **five thousand** people. **He** could have created food from nothing just as easily. But the way **He** fed **the five thousand** pictures the way **ADONAI** always works. **He** takes the sacrificial and seemingly insignificant gifts we offer in faith and **He** multiplies them to accomplish marvelous things.

Now you would think that **the apostles** would have gotten the point that **Christ** was trying to teach *them*. But they evidently did not. **Mark** tells us: **For they had not understood about the loaves** because **their hearts were hardened** (**Mark 6:51b-52**). They had not yet received **the Ruach HaKodesh** to teach and guide them. They had not yet graduated from **Yeshua's** apostolic university.

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."⁷⁹⁶

***Elohim,** why do we doubt **You**? Time and time again, **You** have proved **Your** faithfulness, yet our faith falters. Thank **You** for continually providing for our needs. Keep us from doubt. Fill us with faith in **You**. Remind us that **You** are bigger than all of our problems and needs.*⁷⁹⁷