

Jesus the Bread of Life

John 6: 22-71

DIG: What does the crowd ask Jesus to do so that they can believe in Him? What is their real interest? How does Yeshua use their interest in **food** to illustrate what He wants them to understand? What claims does Messiah make in verses 35-40? What do these claims emphasize about His being **the Bread of life**? About the will of the Father? In verses 41-42, how do the crowds respond to His claims? What part is played by God and by the people in the process of coming to know Christ in verses 44-45? How is **the bread** Jesus gives greater than that of Moses? What does it mean to **eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord**? Describe the believer's unbreakable union with Christ. When Yochanan says **the Spirit gives life** (John 6:63a), what does he mean? What three results came from this teaching about **the bread of life**?

REFLECT: In your culture, what is the main reason to follow Yeshua? What was your original motive? How would you describe your daily spiritual diet? Junk food? Frozen food? Baby food? TV microwave food? Left-overs? Meat and potatoes? Pure **bread** and wine? Has your familiarity with Jesus ever kept you from seeing who He really is? What can you do to remove the blinders?

The next day after the Lord had miraculously fed the multitudes, part of the crowd stayed and looked for Messiah on the grassy slopes of Bethsaida Julias. They had been very anxious to make Him king the day before, so it is not surprising that with the morning light those that remained there once again sought after Him. They realized that only one boat had left with the apostles back across the Sea of Galilee and Jesus wasn't in it, so they assumed the talmidim had gone back across the Lake alone (Yochanan 6:22).

Some boats from Tiberias had landed sometime during the night near Bethsaida Julias, where people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks (John 6:23). No doubt they had taken shelter from the storm. Tiberias was a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, founded by Herod Antipas and named for Emperor Tiberius, the heir of Caesar Augustus' titles and power. Because it had been built on the site of Jewish burial grounds, the righteous of the TaNaKh refused to live there, which left it open to Hellenized Jews and Herod's political allies.

But after they had searched for some time, the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor His talmidim were on the same side of the Lake as they were, so they got into the boats from Tiberias and went across the Lake to Capernaum in search of Jesus (John 6:24).

When they found Him on the other side of the Lake, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here" (Yochanan 6:25)? The people were surprised to find Jesus so far from where He was last seen in so short a time, but their question suggests more than a desire to know *when* He had arrived or how. Based on the Lord's response, they wanted to know *why* He was there (and perhaps not where they thought He should be) and *why* He had deliberately eluded them!⁸¹⁴

Messiah simply ignored their question. It was no time to talk about trivial things, there was no time to talk about how He got to Gennesaret. He got straight to the point. Jesus said: **I tell you the truth, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill (John 6:26)**. The miraculous signs should have awakened their consciousness of God, but they were only conscious of their own physical needs. It's as if Yeshua said, "You cannot think about your souls for thinking of your stomachs." They had received a free and generous meal, though they wanted more. There were other hungers, however, that only He could satisfy.

The Lord responded to the spokesmen of the crowd with an indictment, one sounding like the words of Moshe (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). **Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval (John 6:27)**. The Jews wandered in the wilderness because they failed to trust ADONAI. They failed to enter the Promised Land because the people there looked like giants to them. Nevertheless, God sustained them with manna (see my commentary on Exodus Cr - I Will Rain Down Manna from Heaven for You), while teaching them that the true **food comes from the mouth of God (Mattityahu 4:4)**. Where the Israelites failed, Jesus triumphed and He deeply wanted them to learn from His victory.

Yeshua then contrasted physical **food**, which is the result of work and **spoils** quickly, with spiritual **food**, which comes by grace and lasts forever. Both are necessary for both fulfill two legitimate human needs. In reality, life cannot be sustained without either one. However, **the food that spoils** and **the food that endures to eternal life** are symbolic, and constitute the theme of Christ's remarks here. He challenged the crowd to stop working for **food that spoils** and to dedicate equal passion to satisfying the hunger of their souls. It was as if Messiah was saying, "Just as ADONAI physically sustained you in the desert and called you to be filled by His Torah, so I met your physical need yesterday and now call on you to receive spiritual **food**." Take notice of the irony of Jesus' invitation: **work for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you**. This paradox sounds like God's offer in Isaiah 55:1, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

Then they asked Him, "What must we do to work the works God requires" (John 6:28)? They completely missed the Nazarene's point. They ignored the emphasis on **give** and, instead, chose to focus on **work**. They were so focused on getting fed that they couldn't grasp the Lord's figurative language because of their spiritual blindness. Jesus continued with His earlier paradox when He answered: **The only work of God is to believe in the One He has sent**, which really involves no **work** at all (Yochanan 6:29).

So they asked Him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" This is a pretty strange question for people who have just seen Him feed around twenty thousand people with only five small barley loaves and two small fish (see Fn - **Jesus Feeds the 5,000**). But they seem set on diminishing its importance by presenting one equally great or greater: **Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat"** (see Exodus 16:4-12 and Psalm 105:40). They wanted physical **food**. It is as if they were saying, "Moses brought manna from heaven, what are **You** going to do for us?" The attitude of the crowd generates Yeshua's lengthy discourse (John 6:30-31).

But Jesus reminds them that it was **God**, not **Moses** who brought down the manna. He said to them: **I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world** (John 6:32-33). They wanted a **bread** king who would feed them and overthrow the Romans. "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread" (Yochanan 6:34). They still didn't get it.

Therefore, the **Savior of Sinners** made Himself unmistakably clear. In a single sentence, He linked the concepts of **belief, bread, eternal life** and **Himself**.⁸¹⁵ Then Jesus declared: **I AM the bread of life** (see my commentary on Exodus Fo - **The Bread of the Presence in the Sanctuary: Christ, the Bread of Life**). This is the first of Jesus' seven **I AM's** (Yochanan 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). Each one brings home an important aspect of the **Person** and ministry of the **Chief Shepherd**.

But **Christ's bread** will not merely meet their physical needs, but will meet their spiritual needs. Humans, are driven to satisfy physical hunger, but are motivated by spiritual hunger. The diagnosis of this hunger is a sickness of the spirit, a sickness that needs a spiritual remedy. A life-threatening problem develops called the disease of emptiness. Jesus said: **I AM the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty** (John 6:35). **He Himself** is the food, the sustenance that nourishes spiritual life. It is only from this **bread** that we really obtain spiritual life.

But as I told you, you have seen Me and still you do not believe (John 6:36). According to Yeshua, **faith** responds to **God** when **He** reveals **Himself**. The presence of **God**, then, becomes a sort of litmus test. Those who are **His** respond in belief and are attracted to **Him**, while those who are not respond in disbelief and reject **Him**. **Jesus, God** in human flesh, came to earth to gather **His** own, who can be identified by **their** belief in **Him**.⁸¹⁶

All those the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away. This is as succinct a statement of the paradox of predestination and free will as can be found. **The Father** has given certain **people** to **the Son**. How do I find out if I am one of **them**? By coming to **Christ**. I have free will and can choose to come, and I have **Jesus'** word that **He** will not turn me away.⁸¹⁷ The word **whoever** is universal and reminds us of **John 3:16**. **For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given me, but raise them up at the last day.** In spite of all the unbelief, our **Lord** is going to accomplish the mission for which **He** was sent. **His** ministry would not end in failure. **For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day (Yochanan 6:37-40).** This is one of the strongest passages regarding eternal security of the believer in the Bible (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**).

We learn **God's** will by spending time in **His** presence. The key to knowing **ADONAI's** heart is having a relationship with **Him**. A *personal* relationship. **God** will speak to you differently than **He** will speak to others. Just because **God** spoke to Moshe through a burning bush does not mean we should all sit next to one waiting for **Him** to speak. **Ha'Shem** used a whale to convict **Jonah**. Does that mean we should have worship services at the beach? No. **The LORD** reveals **His** heart personally to each person.

For that reason, your walk with **God** is essential. **His** heart is not seen in an occasional chat or weekly visit. We learn **His** will as we take up residence in **His** house every single day. Walk with **Him** long enough and you will come to know **His** heart.⁸¹⁸

At this the Judeans there began to grumble about Him because He said: **I AM the bread that came down from heaven (John 6:41).** The word **Judeans**, or *Ioudaioi* means something like *unbelievers* in these two verses. That generation was being compared to the generation of Moses. **God** had provided **manna** for them in the wilderness but **they** still grumbled. Now **Jesus** was providing **the bread of life** for them but **they** still grumbled. They said: **Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know (see Ey - Jesus' Mother and Brothers)?** How can he now say: **I AM the bread that came down from heaven (Yochanan 6:42)?** This shows that the **Judeans** understood the **Lord's** words saying that **He** was divine.

Jesus explains the reason for their unbelief in more detail. **Stop grumbling among yourselves, Jesus answered: No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day (John 6:44-45).** This is another insight into the framework of free will. His words were not designed to repel, but to humble. It was not closing the door in their face, but showed how they could enter. It was not intended as saying there was no hope for them, rather it was pointing out the direction in which their hope lay.

Our Lord confirmed what He had just said by appealing to the TaNaKh. **It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God" (Isaiah 54:13). Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me.** They needed to believe that He was the Messiah. They could not believe in the Gospel yet because Yeshua had not died, nor had He been resurrected. But if they believed in Him as the Messiah they would have eternal life. **No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father (Yochanan 6:45-46).** That is to say, God has given them an ear to hear and a heart to perceive. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (First Corinthians 1:23).

Then Christ pursued the line of truth that began in verse 44. **I tell you the truth, the one who believes has eternal life.** This is not an invitation to the lost, but a declaration to the saved. **I AM the bread of life (John 6:47-48).** It was as if Yeshua is saying, "I AM that which all sinners need, and without which they will surely die. I AM that which alone can satisfy the soul and fill the aching heart. I AM that because, just as wheat is ground into flour and then subject to the fire to make it fit for human use, so I, too, have come down all the way from heaven to earth, have passed through the sufferings of death, and AM now presented in the Word of God to all that hunger for life."⁸¹⁹

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I AM the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (Yochanan 6:49-51). To eat the flesh of the Son of Man is to absorb His entire way of being and living. The word for flesh used here (Greek: *sarx*) can also refer to human nature in general, to the physical, emotional, mental and the volitional aspects of human existence. Yeshua wants us to live, feel, think and act like Him; by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh He enables us to do so. Likewise, to drink His blood is to absorb His self-sacrificing life, since the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11).⁸²⁰

Then the Judeans began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat" (John 6:52)? The argument implies that some were strongly for Messiah, though the following narrative makes it clear that they must have been vastly outnumbered. Jesus spoke in parables so that those of unbelief could not understand Him (see [Er - That Same Day He Began To Speak To Them In Parables](#)).

Because of what Yeshua said here, the grumbling (verse 41) quickly became arguing (verse 52), then a hard teaching they could not accept (verse 60), and finally an insuperable barrier for many of His disciples (not the twelve apostles) who turned back and no longer followed him (verse 66).

Jesus didn't try to clarify their misconceptions. Their problem was not intellectual. Instead He intensified their confusion and continued to speak in parables because there was no danger of losing genuine believers. He didn't back down one bit when He said to them: **I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.** Most of the Jews didn't know Yeshua was talking figuratively and this was extremely detestable to them because the Torah said: **You must not eat the blood (Leviticus 7:26).** What had been put negatively was now stated positively. **Whoever eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day (John 6:53-54).** Because the Torah commanded: **You must not eat . . . any blood (Leviticus 3:17)** this language must be figurative. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life (Leviticus 17:11). Messiah's hearers must have been shocked by His puzzling words. But the puzzle is unlocked by understanding that Jesus was speaking of His making atonement by His death and giving life to those who personally appropriate Him by faith.⁸²¹

Other things were not food in the true sense. The Lord had already pointed out that **their ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died (Yochanan 6:49).** His opponents had no idea what constituted true bread.⁸²² **For my flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me, and I in them (John 6:55-56).** There would be an unbreakable union with Christ. That means that through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there is an actual uniting of the believer to Messiah in such a manner that what is true of Christ becomes true of the believer, minus His deity. We are placed in the Meshiach: **Second Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1; John 15:4** and He is placed in us: **Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20; John 14:18-20.** We are crucified with Yeshua: **Galatians 2:20** and **Romans 6:6.** We died with the Lord: **Romans 6:4.** We are resurrected with Him: **Ephesians 2:6** and **Romans 6:5.** And we are seated with Jesus: **Ephesians 1:3, 19-20** and **2:6; Colossians 3:1-2; Romans 6:8.**

The characteristics of this **union** are personal and intimate as demonstrated by the figures used to describe it: the vine and the branches (**John 15:5**); the foundation and the building (**First Peter 2:4-5**; **Ephesians 2:20-22**); the husband and the wife (**Ephesians 5:23-32**; **Revelation 19:7-9**); the head and the body (**Ephesians 4:15-16**); and the Father and the Son (**John 17:20-21**).

Then **Yeshua** comes back to **His** sense of mission: **Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.** He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (**Yochanan 6:57-59**). He had spoken there on one other occasion (see **Ck - Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit**).

They needed to believe in **the One** that **God the Father** had sent to have **eternal life**. He would do what **the manna** could not do. It provided physical sustenance, but it could not provide **eternal life**. The point **Jesus** was trying to make was that **food** taken into the body becomes part of the body. So the ones who put **their faith** in **the Messiah** would have **faith** living in **them**, and in turn, **they** will live in **Him**.

Clearly this had a significant impact on many of **Jesus' disciples** who had varying degrees of devotion. At least hundreds were serious enough to consider **Him** their rabbi and would have actively supported a movement to make **Him** king. But **Christ** knew theirs was a fickle kind of devotion that runs hot and cold. **On hearing it, many of His disciples said: This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it (John 6:60)?** The word **hard** (*Greek: skleros*) means *dry, rough, unyielding, or not received without discomfort*. Anything **they** didn't accept would be called **hard**. **The Nazarene** was not difficult to understand, just difficult to accept.

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, **Yeshua** challenged the grumblers with a question: **Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before (John 6:61-62)!** It was as if the **Good Shepherd** was saying, "If you can't accept **My** claim that **I came down from heaven** and you must **eat My flesh** and **drink My blood**; what will **you** think when **I** tell **you** that **I** will **ascend back to heaven**? If you think this teaching is **hard**, you don't stand a chance with teaching that will come later."

When **John** says **the Spirit gives life (John 6:63a)**, he means that all the righteousness of **Christ** is transferred to our spiritual account at the moment of faith (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**). The theological name for this is **imputation**. The Bible teaches us that we have **all** inherited Adam's **sin** nature. **Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 5:12 and**

3:23). In the TaNaKh, there had to be a sacrifice. Blood had to be shed, and a death had to occur; therefore, because of the death of **the Meshiach** on the cross we have a perfect, absolute, righteousness that **God the Father imputes** to us through **His Son**. Because of our faith, we have passed **ADONAI's** final exam of the universe with a hundred percent. When **HaShem** sees us, **He** doesn't see our sin, **He** sees the righteousness of **His Son (Romans 1:17)**. We are in the **Holy One**, and **He** is in us. The only way we get to heaven is a result of the perfect righteousness of **Jesus Christ**.

The flesh is no help. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life (Yochanan 6:63b-c CJB). This is not a downgrading of the body in some Greek dualistic sense, but rather a typically Jewish assertion that without **the Spirit of God**, the physical things have no real value on their own.⁸²³

As hard as **His** words were to accept, they would produce **eternal life**. **Yet, the Lord** despite what would have been expected, **there are some of you who do not believe**. For **Jesus** had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him (**John 6:64**). **John** pictures **Yeshua** here going on **His** serene way, well aware of all that concerned Him and of the crucifixion that awaited Him. **He** now explains that **He** had told them this so that they would not be confused when some did not believe: **This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them (John 6:65)**. It is impossible for us to come to **Christ** without **the Father's** giving us the grace to do so. Left to ourselves, we always prefer our sin. Conversion is always a work of grace.⁸²⁴

The teaching about the bread of life led to three results. First, from this time on many of His disciples, who included multitudes besides the Twelve, turned back and no longer followed Him (Yochanan 6:66). The events of this teaching made it all too clear that following Him meant something entirely different from anything they had anticipated. **Yeshua** succeeded in winnowing out those who were not sincere or who found the cost of **eating His flesh** and **drinking His blood** to high. They rejected His words and retreated back into their sinful, mundane lives.

Secondly, there was a reaffirmation on the part of the eleven of the twelve apostles (excluding Judas). **Jesus** asked them: **You do not want to leave too, do you? Jesus** already knew the answer to **His** own question; **He** challenged the talmidim in order to reinforce **His** teaching on the true nature of salvation. The question was addressed to them all. But it does not surprise us that **Peter** is the spokesman. **He** often appears as such in the Gospels. Then **Simon Peter** answered for the others saying: **Lord, to whom shall we go?** The implied answer is, "There is no one else to go to!" **You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God (Yochanan 6:67-69).** The nature of saving faith is not an intellectual game - it's a decision. **The crowd**

wanted to see and *then* believe; **the apostles**, however, believed and *eventually* began to see (Yochanan 14:16-19, 17:24 and 20:29).⁸²⁵

Thirdly, Judas would start his road to apostasy. **Then Jesus replied: Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?** In this case, the "choosing" of **Messiah** did not refer to salvation, but to His invitation to become **apostles** when He said: **Come and see. Yet one of you is a devil** in the spirit of **the Adversary** who would actively oppose what **Christ** stood for. **John** adds a note of explanation: **He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray Him (John 6:70-71).** For the first time, **Judas** was identified as the coming **betrayers**. **Yochanan** and the other Gospel writers never attack **Judas** when **they** speak of **him**. **They** simply record the facts and let them speak for themselves. At most, as here, **they** mention that **he** was one of **the talmidim**, but even then **they** merely let the readers work out how that adds to the enormity of **his** crime.

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series of articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

I was not always old, but once was young. And I traveled in the School of the Prophets. And on the day before the Lord's Day I rode every week Nineteen Miles that on Sunday I might speak the Word of God to the people in a Little White Church with a Tall Steeple. And on Monday, I rode home again. And there were times when the Roads were bad, so that for every foot that my horse went forward, he sank in the mud up the depth of half a foot; so I went down through Nine Miles and the half Mile of mud before I got there. But when I arrived then did the good people welcome me into warm homes and clean beds and set before me hot suppers.

For I boarded among them. And at the first place where I stayed on Preparation Day before Sunday, the good woman set before me Coconut Cake. And I ate plenty of it.

Now the women of the other homes inquired of her, saying, How did you like the Young Minister? And is he hard to entertain? And did he cause you much trouble? And is he fussy? And what does he like to eat?

And she said, He is not fussy, and he said to me that Coconut Cake is his Favorite Cake.

Now all the women told all the other women, saying, The Young Minister loves Coconut Cake. And they all knew how to make Coconut Cake, and they all made it. And wherever I went, there did they set before me Coconut Cake.

Now you probably think within your heart that I got so much Coconut Cake that I hated it and that I have never liked it since. But you have Another Thing coming. For you don't know what kind of Coconut Cake the women of that church made. Yes, for three years did I eat it with hardly ever a break in the record, except they also made Cake with Maple Sugar Frosting. And the person who has eaten that kind of Cake knows that that is about the best ever made.

For there are some things of which no one can ever have too much. And when my heart goes back across the years, then do I remember the long rides, and the times that I drove up in the dark and cold, and how they stabled my horse knee-deep in clean straw, and put a sack of oats under the buggy-seat when I departed, and maybe also a Bushel of Potatoes or a Sack of Apples or a Can of Maple Syrup. And I know that I shall never have too much of any of the good things which they bestowed upon me, especially **the Bread of life**.

And now and then as the years go by, and one and another of those I loved is called home, then do they send for me to come and say a word of love before the dust returns to dust. And ever there is some good woman who has a table set for me in her home; and there do I always find Coconut Cake.

And whenever I eat Coconut Cake that is Unusually Nice, then do I remember the friends of my early Ministry as a Messenger of **God**, and I love them yet.⁸²⁶