

Feeding of the 5,000

The feeding of 5,000 men plus an unknown number of women and children marked another year in Jesus' life and ministry (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). It is generally agreed that this miracle occurred sometime between the first one to one and half years of ministry; however, some believe that another year had elapsed. This is the *only* miracle that is recorded in all four gospels. This suggests that the miracle is highly unique among the miracles, wonders, and signs that Jesus performed. Why was this one so important? Why was only this one recorded in all four gospels? We will discover that the miracle was visible to more than just the disciples. Probably 20,000 men, women and children were present who witnessed the impossibility of this event. That was an unbelievable miracle.

BACKGROUND. This miracle occurred after Jesus' disciples returned from their mission of preaching and healing in Israel (Matthew 10:1-42) and gave their report to Jesus (Mark 6:30-32; Luke 9:10-11). The disciples' report was simple. They told Him what they had done and taught (Mark 6:30). That is all that the scriptures say, and so that is all that we know. Jesus' popularity was so great that people were constantly seeking and coming to Him. As a result, Jesus had few opportunities to rest and was forced finally to seek a secluded place where He and the disciples could rest (Mark 6:31).

And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) (NASB) Mark 6:31

They attempted to escape the crowd by getting into a boat and sailing across the Sea of Galilee to the coast near the city of Bethsaida (Mark 6:32; Luke 9:10).

After these things Jesus went

away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). (NASB) John 6:1

... Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. (NASB) Luke 9:10

But somehow the crowds knew that Jesus had slipped away. Some of them knew that Jesus and the disciples had left for Bethsaida, so they followed. How did they know? Had someone overheard Jesus telling His disciples that they

were going to Bethsaida? We do not know. But somehow they knew, and Mark 6:33 tells us that the news that Jesus was going to Bethsaida spread everywhere from city to city.

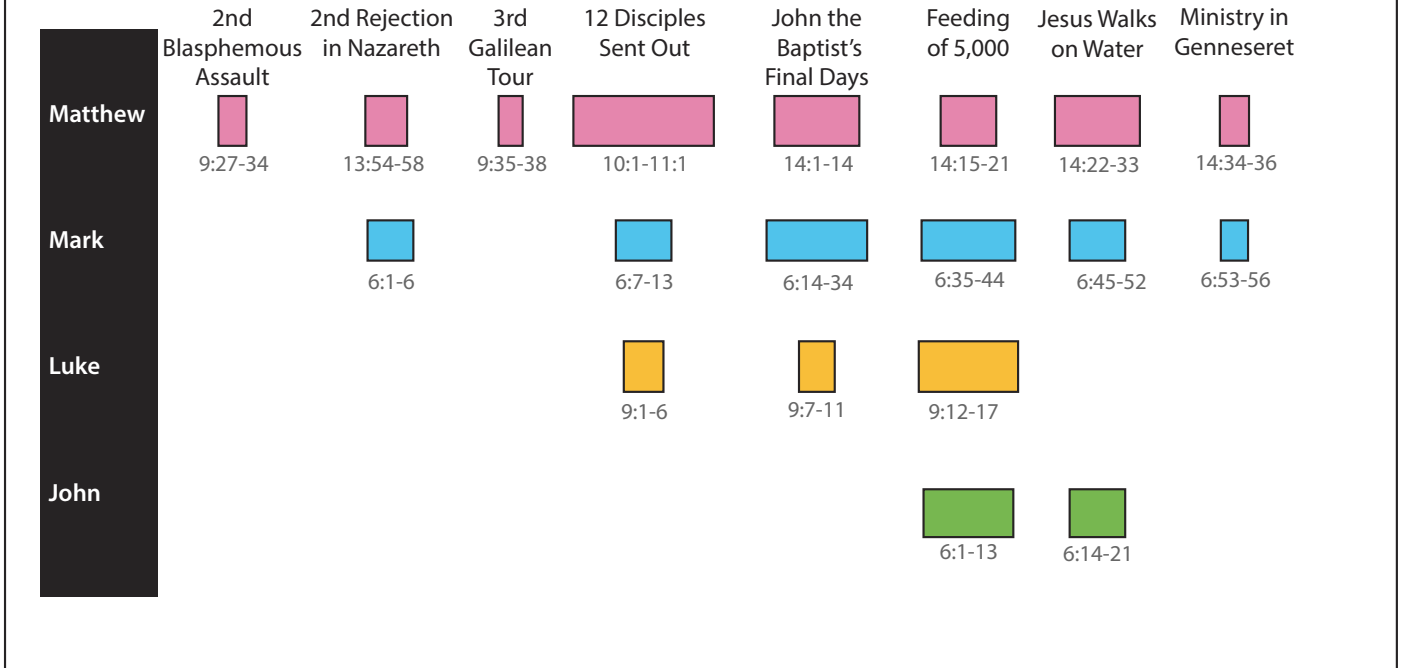
The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. (NASB) Mark 6:33

People were running from many different cities to Bethsaida in order to see Jesus. This is an incredible picture of



Life and Heart of Jesus

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the passion and excitement that these people had for Jesus. They really wanted to see and be with Him. The gospel of John says that people were seeking Him because of the signs that He had performed.

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. (NASB) John 6:2

While they did not know who Jesus truly was, they at least knew that He was like no one they had ever experienced. As a result, some of the people arrived before Jesus arrived in Bethsaida. The news spread faster than a wild fire.

EARLY IN THE DAY. When Jesus and the disciples arrived, they saw a crowd of people waiting for Him. Jesus graciously welcomed them because He felt compassion for them and because they were without a spiritual shepherd who truly cared for them (Mark 6:34). He did this even though He wanted some rest (Matt. 14:13-14). Jesus was absolutely selfless!

When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion

for them and healed their sick. (NASB) Matt. 14:14

Then Jesus went up on a hill and sat down with His disciples in preparation to teach the people. We are told that He taught them about the kingdom of God and healed many.

Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. (NASB) John 6:3

... He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. (NASB) Luke 9:11

It appears that He started teaching early in the day; and then sometime later in the day, another large crowd came. Apparently, people just kept coming throughout the day, some groups being larger than others. Some of these people may have been travelers who had come for the Jewish Passover feast that was approaching. When they heard that Jesus was near, they stopped to see Him.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to

Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” (NASB) John 6:4-5

John 6:7

As the second large crowd was arriving, Jesus asked Philip, “Where can we buy bread?” Philip did not know that was a test.

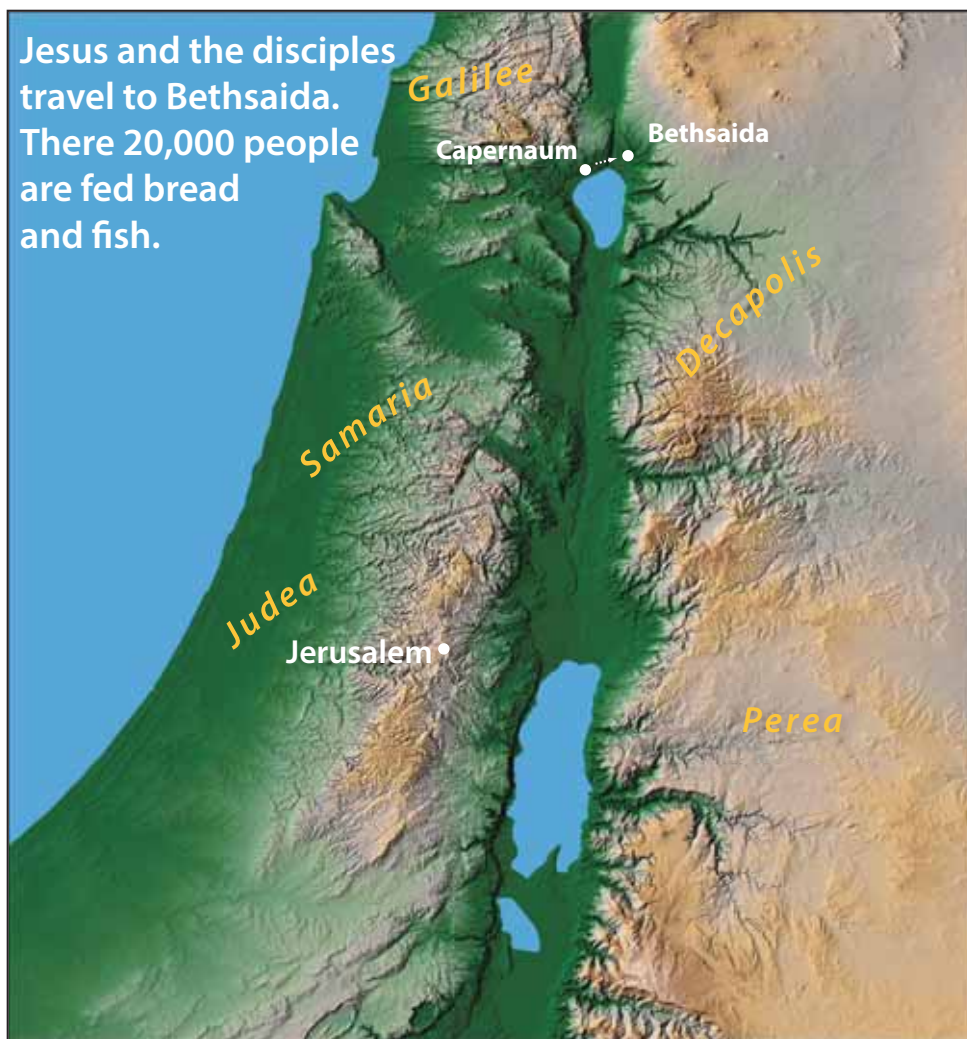
This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. (NASB) John 6:6

Two hundred denarii in Jesus’ day represented about eight to ten months of a common laborer’s salary (Matt. 20:8). Yet, it was not enough to feed 20,000 or more men, women, and children. At best, the money could have fed 8,000 people, but not 20,000 people. There was not enough money for the people to receive even a snack, and Philip knew it. Philip was correct, but he missed the point. He failed the test. Jesus’ question had been a set-up - a test. He failed to realize that

Tests are nothing new! Each of us is tested by our God. Divine tests are designed for our spiritual growth. How we react reveals our divine perspective or lack of one. If we are sensitive to God, we learn from the test. This was a test of Philip’s perspective about Jesus. The question was simple, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” Philip knew

that the two hundred denarii that were in the treasurer’s bag was not enough to feed the enormous crowd of people. So that was his response.

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” (NASB)

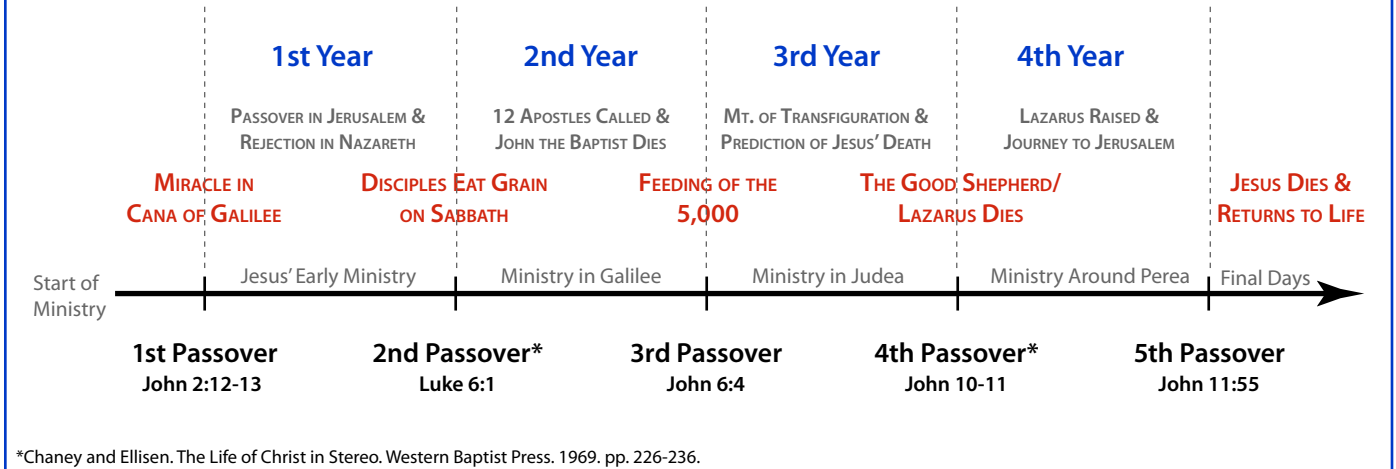


Jesus was all that he needed - nothing more! He did not need money. He only needed Jesus. It appears that Jesus did not answer Philip! If that is true, it must have caused Philip to think about his answer.

Often we are like Philip. We look to the people around us to help us - doctors, politicians, pastors, the elders of the church, neighbors, or family members. We

forget that God is all that we really need. Sometimes we think that money is the solution. Are you trapped among the sights, sounds, and the desires of this world? If God is the supplier of our daily bread and our daily needs, then He is all that we need. He and He alone can meet all of our needs, including those that we do not think about! It all

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comes down to your perspective. Is Jesus everything to you?

EVENING COMES. The three other gospels reveal that there is a break in the events that occurred after the conversation between Jesus and Philip. That is, not all of the events of the day were recorded. If we look closely, it is clear that Jesus' teachings of the day are not recorded. We are not told what miracles Jesus may have performed. We do not know if Jesus spoke with any other people; nor do we know what occurred in the afternoon. Did they eat midday? The scriptures do not try to give us all of the details. All that we know is the next thing that we are told is that evening is approaching. It is late in the day. The day is ending.

Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." (NASB) Luke 9:12

The Jewish evening came at about 5-6 pm. Darkness would be coming in several hours. So the twelve disciples came to Jesus and asked Him to send the people away so that they could buy food. They are trying to be kind. Matthew 14:15 and Mark 6:35 add that the place where Jesus was teaching and preaching was desolate, implying that food and water was not scarce - it did not exist there.

What just occurred was very different from the events that occurred earlier between Jesus and Philip. Then Jesus asked Philip the question about buying food. Here the disciples ask the question. The first time Jesus initiated the discussion. This time the disciples initiated the discussion.

How did Jesus respond? He took the opportunity to test *all* twelve disciples.

But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." (NASB) Mark 6:37-38

This time Jesus did not ask a question but gave them a command. "You give them something to eat!" Just like Philip, the twelve could only think in earthly terms - two hundred denarii. Just like Philip, they knew that the money could not feed the enormous crowd. So they answered, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" Then just as it appears that Jesus did not answer Philip, it appears that He did not answer the question of the twelve disciples either. He left them hanging, except to ask and command, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!"

FEEDING THE CROWD. The disciples hurried off to find food, and they discovered five loaves and two fishes. When the disciples returned, the gospel of John says that Peter told Jesus what they found - five barley loaves of bread and two fish. The food belonged to a young boy. Was it his dinner?

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" (NASB) John 6:8-9

Then Jesus ordered the crowd to sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds.

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. (NASB) John 6:10

They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. (NASB) Mark 6:40

Jesus blessed the five loaves of barley bread and the two fish and started breaking them into pieces and placing the fragments in baskets for the disciples to distribute.

And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. (NASB) Mark 6:41

This is amazing. Jesus did not rebuke Philip. Neither did He rebuke the disciples or Peter. No rebuke. He just demonstrated the answer to them. God does the same with us sometimes. Sometimes we fret and become anxious. We forget to pray. We forget to seek Him first. Then God may simply provide the solution to our problem before we even think about praying about the problem or need. Philip and the disciples had made wrong choices. Their focus was wrong. They had such a narrow perspective. We do the same. We think about doctors first when we are sick. We worry about our money, our employer, or something else and forget that God is the one who ultimately meets our every need.

I can just imagine the disciples standing and watching Jesus breaking the fish and loaves into pieces. Just like the widow's oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7 that never ran dry until the need was met. When my wife and I were in our twenties we owned a Volkswagen Beetle. I had taken my wife and two daughters to visit my parents for Christmas in northern California. I will never forget leaving early in the morning at about 2:00-3:00 am and traveling from northern California to southern California through the middle of the state along Interstate 90. It was a long drive. I had wanted to avoid the traffic congestion, so it seemed like a great idea to leave in the early morning. I discovered later that it was rather foolish. I did not understand until later in the morning when the fuel tank gauge indicated that my automobile needed fuel. All of the gas stations along the interstate were closed. I started desperately looking for gasoline. After driving another 30-60 minutes, the fuel gauge indicated that the car was out of gasoline. The needle pointed below "E." In desperation I turned off the road onto another road headed due east looking for a fuel station. I finally found an open station after about 30-45 minutes. The fuel gauge still indicated that the tank was empty. That was not possible, but we had been praying. We had been asking God to help, and He did. I got great gasoline mileage that morning - but nothing that the Volkswagen company could advertise. When God wants to multiply oil, fuel, bread, or fish, He can and will.

Jesus kept breaking the loaves of bread and fish. Every time I think about this event I wonder if Peter had asked permission to take the little boy's food. I wonder if the boy was standing and watching Jesus break up the food. If he was, I wonder what he thought as he saw Jesus breaking off pieces of bread and fish and putting them into one basket after another. I wonder if he ran to his parents and to others shouting with excitement and encouraging them to come and watch Jesus creating food. That little boy must have been one very excited and ecstatic lad and so must have anyone else who was watching.

Jesus kept creating food and finally the crowd was fully and completely satisfied.

They all ate and were satisfied . . . (NASB) Mark 6:42

The Greek word that is translated as “satisfied” refers to being fattened like cattle. That is, no one was hungry. This was not a snack of a quarter or half slice of bread and a small bit of fish. This was a meal. This was a miracle!

... and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. (NASB) Mark 6:43-44

There was plenty of food left that evening.

CONCLUSION. When the people saw this miracle, they believed that Jesus was a prophet.

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (NASB) John 6:14

They wanted to make Him king.

So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone. (NASB) John 6:15

Why was this miracle recorded in all four gospels? It was recorded because it should not have been possible. There were no modern cafeterias, restaurants, or fast food companies in Jesus’ day. The people knew that the vast quantity of food was a miracle, and so did the disciples. Who can take five loaves of barley bread and two fish and feed 20,00 or more? No one can fake feeding that many people with a boy’s lunch - food intended for one person. It was not possible to hide this miracle from the eyes of the people while they watched. The excitement of the little boy must have been awesome to watch. Was he jumping up and down? This was a miracle beyond anything that any of them could have imagined.

This miracle reveals the truth about Jesus. He was God in human flesh. He created food. Why do you honor Jesus? Is it because He meets your daily needs - provides you “bread and fish?” Did He repair your marriage? Why do you respect Him, or honor Him, or love Him? Is it because He has done something or is doing something for you? Is it because He died for you and returned to life so that your sins could be forgiven? This is a call to honor, adore, and love Him because He is God and deserves it. May we honor Him because He is simply beyond anything that anyone can imagine! May we jump and down for joy because of Jesus! He is our Creator!