

# Feeding of the Four Thousand

In our last study Jesus was in the region known as the Decapolis. Jesus went there in an attempt to get some rest, but he was unsuccessful due to the crowds that came after Him. Nevertheless, He healed many that day including a man who could not speak and could barely hear. The miracle was unusual since Jesus' method was unusual. After his long and tiring day, Jesus remained in the area. News about Him spread everywhere after that day of healing miracles. If we could have been there, we would have heard excited people talking about the various and many healing miracles that He had performed. We might have heard someone talking about the healing of their grandmother, a father, or some mother's child. Since they did not have printing presses, televisions or radios, news spread by word of mouth. The news about Jesus was not the ordinary common stuff. It was extremely impressive news. The people came from all over the region and as we will soon discover, the crowd was large.

**THE SITUATION.** The events that followed are described in Mark 8:1-21 and Matthew 15:32-16:12. Mark 8:1-21 indicates that a very large crowd had gathered and had been with Jesus for three days. When is the last time a crowd gathered and remained for days to listen to anyone in our times? They did in Jesus' day. They remained so long that the food that they had brought had been depleted. When the evening of the third day came, they were hungry.

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat." Mark 8:1-2 (NAS95)

Jesus knew this and responded with compas-

sion. Consequently, Jesus turned to his disciples and began to involve them in what would eventually become another spiritual lesson. Jesus knew what He planned to do, but the disciples were clueless. So He said,

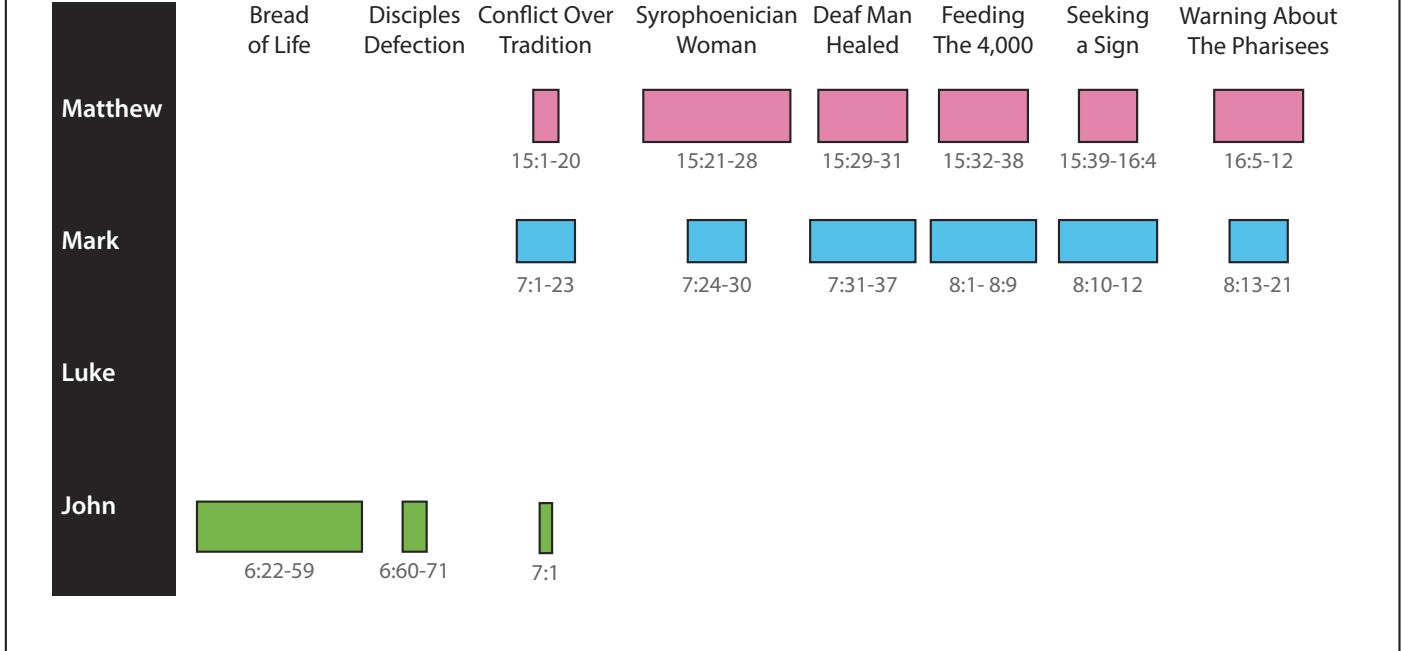
If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance. Mark 8:3 (NAS95)



**THE PROBLEM.** Whenever this meeting out-in-the-open occurred, it was desolate. There was no food nearby. Verse nine reveals that the crowd was indeed large. There were four thousand people. Since the Jews typically counted only the men in those days, as indicated in Matthew 15:38, we can reasonably conclude that there could have been at least twenty thousand

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people, including women and children.

Jesus started by calling their attention to the personal needs of the men, women, and children that were present. Sometimes we become enthusiastic about all of the people or the events that are occurring, and we forget about the needs of individuals. But that was not true of Jesus.

*And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?” Mark 8:4 (NAS95)*

The disciples’ response to Jesus’ statement that the people were hungry reveals that they only saw the roadblocks and not the solution. They had not learned from their previous experience when Jesus fed five thousand men and an unstated number of women and children. So Jesus helped them.

*And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” Mark 8:5 (NAS95)*

What a simple question Jesus asked. The disciples knew how to count even though they were spiritually short-sighted - perhaps many as twenty thousand people and only seven loaves of bread. Peter and the other disciples must have thought what an impossible task to feed so many people with so little. Sometimes we think that way. We see our finances disappearing and our first thought is to get a second job or work harder. Sometimes church leaders only see how “little monies” the Lord is providing and forget that our God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10). When we do not respond with, “Lord help” we have excluded God and assumed that we will solve our own problems. We forget that God owns everything, and He can meet our needs easily. Also, I wonder if one of the disciples started strategizing how he could be one of the first to get some of the food before it disappeared? If so, he thought only of himself and not the masses seeking Jesus’ ministry.

**THE SOLUTION.** After the disciple answered, Jesus asked everyone to sit down.

*And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and*

taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. Mark 8:6 (NAS95S)

He gave thanks for the food and started breaking bread into pieces and asked the disciples to distribute the food. The disciples also found some fish. Jesus blessed them and distributed those fragments as well.

They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. Mark 8:7 (NAS95S)

Seven loaves of bread and some fish were enough to feed

more. God can do the same for us. God is never unable to help us. He is God. He will do the same for us if we ask and if it is in our best interest (James 4:3; 1 John 5:14). After the people had been fed, Jesus sent them away. He then got into a boat and left the region.

And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan. Matt 15:39 (NAS95S)

Mark 8:10 adds that He and the disciples went to the “district of Dalmanutha.” The exact location of the “district of Dalmanutha” is unknown today. However, ruins have been found on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee

<i>Feeding Miracles</i>	
<b>Feeding of 5,000</b> Matt. 14:15-21 Mark 6:35-44 Luke 9:12-17 John 6:1-13	<b>Feeding of 4,000</b> Matt. 15:32-39 Mark 8:1-10
<i>People Were With Jesus one day. Food - 5 loaves and 2 fish. People sat on the grass. 12 baskets of food leftover.</i>	<i>With Jesus three days. Food - 7 loaves and some fish. People sat on the ground. 7 baskets of food leftover.</i>

the enormous crowd when it was in our Lord’s hands. Otherwise, it would not have fed more than twenty or thirty people. But in Jesus’ hands there was food left over.

And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away. Mark 8:8-9 (NAS95S)

They started with seven loaves of bread and some fish and ended up with seven large baskets full. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus made extra? He met their need and then provided

with the name of Dalmanuth.<sup>1</sup> It appears that Dalmanuth and Magadan were located close to each other. Magadan was the home of Mary Magdalene. It was located south of Capernaum.

**CLAIM OF THE CRITICS.** Some claim that the miracle of the feeding of five thousand and the feeding of four thousand are the same miracle. But a quick comparison of both miracles reveals that during the feeding of “five thousand,” the people were with Jesus for one day. During the feeding of the “four thousand,” they were with Him for three days.

1. Merriell C. Tenny. Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House. 1976. p. 6.

The number of fish is different, and the number of baskets full of food is different. One group sat on grass and the other group sat on the ground. The Holy Spirit had Matthew and Mark record the events. To conclude that either did not really occur is to imply that God is a liar since He wrote both accounts. The goal of the critics is to discredit the Bible and consequently our God. No, both accounts are real. It is only speculation that the accounts are different perspectives of the same event. In fact, we will discover shortly that Jesus will tell us that both events actually did occur.

**SEEKERS OF SIGNS.** Jesus and the disciples have just had a wonderful experience. The crowd was magnificent. The miracle is incredible. They must have been on an emotional high. So we should not be surprised at what happened next. As soon as Jesus arrived in the region of Magadan, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Him once again and accused Him of performing His miracles and wonders by the power of Satan. That must have been a discouragement to the disciples and maybe even for Jesus.

*The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away. Matt 16:1-4 (NAS95)*

Please note that we have quoted Matthew since Mark 8:11-12 is a shorter summary of the encounter. About three to four months ago, the religious leaders had accused Jesus of using the power of Satan (Matt. 12:24-32) to perform His miracles and wonders, and they will do it again in the future (Luke 11:14-23). It is probably reasonable to conclude that they were constantly accusing Him of this over and over again as they tried to discredit Jesus to the people. It is important to note that this is an objective admission by Jesus' enemies that He really did perform miracles. He did heal people and perform wonders. They just disagreed as to

how He accomplished the miracles and wonders. It is truly amazing that this accusation was made of Jesus after such an incredible miracle had just occurred.

When they challenged Jesus, He reminded them that they were able to forecast the weather reasonably well by watching the color of the sky, but they were not very good at realizing the truth of who He was. In response, Jesus made a prophecy that came true in less than one-half year. I wonder how many of them remembered, repented later and turned to God in sorrow with belief? After that encounter, Jesus left the region and went back to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

This episode reminds us that even when we are doing what God wants and when some very wonderful things are occurring in the ministry that God has given us, we will still be criticized. The evil one is relentless and hopes to discourage us and knock us off course. The Holy Spirit reminds us in 1 Corinthians and Hebrews 6:10 that our labor is not in vain and that God remembers what we have done.

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Cor 15:58 (NAS95)*

*For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. Heb 6:10 (NAS95)*

If you are discouraged in the ministry, be encouraged. You are working for God and He has not forgotten you. He will not forget. He is still on the throne.

**A SPIRITUAL LESSON.** After they arrived on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples discovered that they had failed to bring along any food. This is an amazing section of scripture. Food has been the underlying issue.

*And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. Matt 16:5 (NAS95)*

Most likely a conversation followed when they mentioned that they had forgotten to bring food, but it is not recorded

for us. Then Jesus attempted to use the conversation to communicate a spiritual truth.

And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matt 16:6 (NAS95S)

Jesus’ warning must have surprised them. It sounded like Jesus wanted to talk about bread.

They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “He said that because we did not bring any bread.” Matt 16:7 (NAS95S)

The disciples were simply clueless and Jesus rebuked them.

But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?” Matt 16:8 (NAS95S)

Why did Jesus say these men had little faith? Are we to assume that Jesus expected them to be able to create their own food as He did? Jesus’ next statement revealed why He called them men of little faith.

Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? Matt 16:9-10 (NAS95S)

No, Jesus is not concerned with food. Nor should they have been. They should have known that Jesus could meet their need. They had just watched Jesus feed an enormous crowd with a small amount of bread and fish and ended up with more food than that with which they had started. The disciples were indeed men of little faith. Food was not the issue. Something else was the topic of conversation. Oh, did you notice that Jesus reveals that *both* miracles of feeding four thousand and five thousand actually did occur?

How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matt 16:11 (NAS95S)

What they missed was that food should never be a concern with Jesus. What they should have understood was that Jesus was warning them about the false teaching of the Pharisees. Their teaching was like leaven or yeast. It grows on its own during heat. It rises and spreads and cannot be stopped. Their false accusations about Jesus were dangerous, and their teachings about the scriptures were false. Religious leaders can be dangerous. After Jesus’ last comment, they finally understood, as we discover in the next verse.

Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matt 16:12 (NAS95S)

**FALSE TEACHERS.** Jesus warned the disciples about false teachers, and so did the apostles. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30 that men would come into air meetings or churches and teach error.

... savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29-30 (NAS95S)

In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul wrote that he was surprised the Galatians were so quickly accepting falsehood as being truth. In Colossians the apostle was defending the deity of Jesus Christ. In 2 Thessalonians he had to remind them about the truth of future things. In 2 Timothy 2:16-18 Paul reveals that some individuals were claiming that the final resurrection had already occurred. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3 the apostle predicted what would occur in our times,

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim 4:1-3 (NAS95S)

your church? Remember Jesus' warning!

False teachers and false teaching did not just occur in Jesus' day. Error has been a problem for all ages. Today, error is very common. It seems to be everywhere. It is in the public arena as well as in the church. Some call it liberalism and others simply call it error. Dr. J. Vernon McGee made the following comment some years ago,

Actually, what is liberalism? It all came into existence by the pulpit trying to please the unsaved members. And today we have a lot of men trying to please the congregation, even when they are unsaved. And that, may I say, is putting leaven in - that is, mixing wrong teaching with the truth of the gospel. The only kind of bread they will eat is that which has leaven because leaven makes bread taste good. I was brought up on hot biscuits, friend, and the natural man likes them. Leaven is the evil that is put in. And these He is warning about the wrong teaching of the Pharisees .  
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**CONCLUSION.** Jesus warned His disciples about false teachers and their teachings. It is present today in our churches, nations, and in our world. Today, many avoid unpleasant topics in order to appeal to a wide range of people. I once visited a church where the pastor did not believe that Jesus was God, but one could not discover that from his sermon. He kept that a secret. He never revealed that to the congregation. That was discovered in a private conversation after the church service. A growing, spiritually healthy church is not necessarily one that is large, wealthy, or looks great on the outside. While several things must exist for a church to be spiritually healthy, there is at least one thing that must be true. It must at least teach the truth.

The disciples were part of a great ministry. They saw wonderful miracles, wonders, and incredible events. They saw Jesus in action with false teachers. But best of all, they heard the truth. What do you look for in a church? Do you look for pleasant surroundings, worship music, friends, or a dynamic preacher? But are you discovering spiritual truth? Are you truly growing spiritually? Are you learning something new each Sunday? Is truth being taught? Why are you attending

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2. J. Vernon McGee. Thru The Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 1983., vol. iv p. 195.