

## John Lesson # 7 Articles

The feeding the 5,000 shows us that salvation satisfies the inner needs of the heart. Jesus is the Bread of Life. This miracle also reminds us that, while salvation is of the Lord and bestowed only by grace, God still uses human instruments to take the Gospel message to men. Jesus gave the bread and fish to His disciples, and they shared it with the people. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” asks Paul in Rom. 10:14. If, like the little lad in John 6:9, we will give Him our all, He will take it, break it, and use it to bless others.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter the scene shifts to the hungry Galileans of chap. 6. In this context reminiscent of Israel’s first generation, the crossing of the sea (6:1) and the coming of the crowd out to a lonely arid mountain region (6:3) formed a picture-perfect setting for considering how Jesus could be related to the stories of the exodus. Therefore it should be no surprise that the stories of Jesus in this chapter deal with a miraculous feeding and the control of the sea. Moses had been mentioned as a witness in the concluding arguments of the last chapter (5:45–46). Now the evangelist introduces the New Moses in the wilderness.

It also should come as no surprise in such a context that the evangelist announces it was Passover time (6:4). Those who are familiar with the Passover Haggada even today should recall in the introduction to the Seder ceremony, before the important pronouncing of the “three words” and the “Halleluya,” that two of the great “benefits” or historic remembrances therein rehearsed are the control of the sea and the feeding of manna.<sup>55</sup> For Christians who do not usually live with the experience of the Passover Seder, it is crucial to recognize that the celebration of Passover focuses not merely on the lamb but on the entire exodus rescue experience. Passover epitomizes God’s claiming and releasing of his people as well as his preservation of the people by supplying them with food and rescuing them from the threatening sea. Passover is a multifaceted identifying celebration, and the evangelist knew it well.

Those familiar with the Psalms will also recognize that the two mercies of water control and food supply were very significant to the psalmist (cf. Ps 78:13–30). In Israel’s history, stories of food and water are indelibly attached to faith. From the tree of life in the garden, the rescue of Noah in the flood, and throughout their pilgrimage these two symbols are repeatedly rewoven into the fabric of God’s dealings with his people. It is understandable then that Paul, thinking like a Jew, also linked these two symbols in his warnings to the Corinthians about their relationship with God (1 Cor 10:1–4).

Accordingly, when the early Christians began to tell their stories about the Lord, the miracles of bread and water control likely would have become some of their early favorites. Luke, the Gentile among the evangelists, apparently did not think it necessary to follow that pattern (9:10–17). It is interesting to ponder whether or not a cultural heritage had anything to do with the differences between Luke and Matthew, Mark & John.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it is strategic to recognize that for a Jew the control of water and the concept of eating are forever linked in Passover.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (pp. 225–226). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>55</sup> See H. Fisch, ed., *Haggada* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1965); cf. P. Borgen, “Observations on the Midrashic Character of John 6,” *ZNW* 54 (1963): 232–39.

<sup>57</sup> The same pattern does not hold for Mark’s second story of the feeding of the four thousand. A water miracle is not present, but it is intriguing that the story concludes with the mention of their moving to the boats (Mark 8:10), and the subsequent discussion about a sign includes a note about a loaf in the boat (8:14) and the implications of feeding (cf. Matt 15:32–39; 16:5–12). The stilling of the storm miracle does not fit this joint pattern in any of the Synoptics, though Mark’s walking on the water scene does have a brief note that the wind ceased (Mark 6:51), and that text is linked to a feeding scene. The stilling of the storm is not in John.

<sup>2</sup> Borchert, G. L. (1996). *John 1–11* (Vol. 25A, pp. 249–250). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.