

Matthew 14:15-21

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Jesus multiplies the provisions of five loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people. This miracle parallels the God's provision of manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness during the time of Moses.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:5-14.

None of the Gospel writers record the time of day *when Jesus* withdrew to find a secluded place or when He arrived to shore and saw the large crowd. We don't know exactly how long *He* was healing their sick. It may have been in the early morning or mid-afternoon. But we do know that it was for an extended period because he tells us of a change in the day: *when it was evening*.

Matthew also tells us that His *disciples came to Him when evening* arrived. Because we know *Jesus* got in the boat alone, we know that *the disciples* must have either come with *the crowds* to where *Jesus* was or followed them. We don't know if they witnessed or participated in the healings or if they just arrived *when it was evening*. At any rate, once it was *evening they* approached *Jesus* to tell Him *"This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."*

Evidently, *the crowds* had walked so far that it was too *late* for them to return to their homes and cook a meal before bedtime. If *Jesus* did not dismiss them now, they would not have anything to eat. *The disciples* naturally assumed that *the crowds* would have to go into the local villages and buy what food they could find for themselves.

But Jesus challenged their natural assumptions. *He said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!"* Startled by the seeming ridiculousness and impossibility of *Jesus's* command *the disciples* retorted with scanty facts, *"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish."* Among themselves *the disciples* did not have anywhere near enough provisions on hand necessary to feed so large of *crowds*. But they were enough for *Jesus*.

And He asked His *disciples* to bring the loaves and fish here to Me. Matthew writes that *Jesus* was ordering the people to sit down on the grass. Mark's gospel specifies that *"they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties"* (Mark 6:40). As they sat down on the grass *Jesus* performed one of His most famous miracles.

He took the meager rations, and looking up toward heaven to acknowledge where all our provisions including our daily bread come from, *He blessed the food and breaking the loaves He gave them to His disciples and His disciples gave them to the crowds. The five loaves and two fish* miraculously multiplied. *They all ate and were satisfied.* God had provided. No one left hungry. Hunger was a normal experience in *Jesus's* day. It would have been rare for any but the

rich and powerful to regularly be full and feel satisfied after a meal. God had granted multitudes a feast.

Matthew adds that when everything was *picked up* there were *twelve full baskets left over of the broken pieces*. This remark not only shows that there was more than enough food for everyone, *twelve* is a symbolic of the *twelve* tribes of Israel. This represents how Jesus as the Messiah in the line of David has come to restore all of Israel. The *five loaves* of bread also has the significance of symbolizing the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Matthew records that there were *about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children*. Conservatively, this figures to be at least ten thousand people. *The crowds* may have numbered as many as twenty thousand.

This miracle, often called “the feeding of the *five thousand*” is the only miracle besides Christ’s resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:33-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:1-14).

Beyond the fact that Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people with only a few small rations, this miracle is particularly remarkable for theological and messianic reasons as well.

First it demonstrates Jesus’s creative power. Christ’s multiplication from small beginnings reflected the creation of the world when God spoke the entire cosmos into being from nothing.

Second, as Jesus provided more than enough food to go around to feed everyone’s physical hunger, Jesus, who reveals Himself to be “the bread of life” (John 6:35) provides more than enough grace to forgive all sins and reconcile the world to Himself.

And third, this miracle echoes and in certain respects surpasses the miracle in Moses’s day when manna fell from Heaven to feed the children of Israel (Exodus 6:4, Deuteronomy 8:3).

“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’”
(John 6:31-33)

The feeding of *the five thousand men* is yet another Messianic identification of *Jesus* who is the prophet like Moses.

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”
(Deuteronomy 18:18)

This prophecy from Deuteronomy occurred after the people had asked Moses to have God speak with him, rather than speaking directly to them from Mount Sinai, lest they die. Moses answered

that this was a good idea, then gave this prophecy. Jesus is now the second Moses, speaking on behalf of God, but He is also God speaking directly to the people.

This miracle occurred approximately one year before *Jesus*'s crucifixion. We know this because John reported that this happened near the time of the Passover feast (John 6:4). *Jesus* was killed the following Passover.

Biblical Text

When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." And He said, "Bring them here to Me." Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.