

Matthew 15:32-39

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Jesus miraculously feeds a multitude of 4,000 Gentile men plus women and children. He then leaves to return to home district across the Sea of Galilee.

The parallel gospel account of this event is found in Mark 8:1-10.

For *three days* Jesus was with a multitude of Gentiles, healing many of their sick on a mountainside in the Decapolis. On the third day, *He called His disciples to Him. He told them I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me for so long and have nothing to eat.* Apparently, the crowd was so enthralled with *Jesus* that *they* either never left His side, or *they* returned to *Him* day after day. *Jesus* continued, *I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.* This mountainside location was remote and *desolate*, and the road back to town where food and shelter awaited must have been a difficult one. Mark even quotes *Jesus* as saying, “and some of *them* have come from a great distance” (Mark 8:3).

Jesus called *His disciples* to *Him* in order to test their faith. *He* knew *He* had the ability to miraculously provide food for everyone. *The disciples* should have known this too. *They* had already seen *Him* feed the crowd of five *thousand men* with only five *loaves* and two *fish* (Matthew 14:15-21). But now *Jesus* was giving *them* an opportunity to demonstrate a growth in their faith. *The disciples* said to *Him*, “Where do You think we would be able to get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?” Based on *the disciples’* response, *they* did not appear to have grown much.

Jesus patiently asked *them*, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” *they* responded, “and a few small fish.”

As *Jesus* had done when He fed the five *thousand men*, *He* directed *the people* to sit down on the ground, before *He* took the seven loaves and the fish. Matthew tells us that after giving thanks to His Father in heaven who provided the *loaves and fish*, *Jesus* broke them and started giving the pieces to the disciples. And as *He* did, *the disciples* gave them to the people. This continued until everyone had food to eat. Like before, *all* ate and were satisfied. No one was hungry. And like before, *the disciples* went around and picked up what was left over of the broken pieces.

But instead of twelve *baskets* of leftovers like when *Jesus* miraculously fed the crowd of Jews, there were seven large baskets full. As was commented earlier, the significance of twelve *baskets* represented how *Jesus* was the Messiah who had come to restore the twelve tribes of *Israel*. The number *seven* in Hebrew culture signified completeness, totality, or fullness. God created the world (and through Adam and Eve, *all people* in it) in six *days*, but on the seventh day God rested (Genesis 2:2). The significance of seven baskets remaining for when *Jesus* fed the Gentile crowd symbolizes how Christ will also redeem and include them into His kingdom. *Jesus* came first to the Jews, but He came to redeem the entire world (John 3:16).

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul comments that after Christ's death and resurrection, the grafting in of Gentiles into God's family had begun to take place.

“...as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”
(Ephesians 3:5b-6)

Jesus's miracle feeding the Gentiles is emblematic of the Christ's redemption of the Gentiles. Their redemption would be accomplished and made possible through the breaking of *Jesus's* body, given for all (the Bread of Life—John 6:35). As the Gospel of John states:

“This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”
(John 6:50-51)

And as the Gospel of Luke states:

“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”
(Luke 22:19)

Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, but *He* was also the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). And the salvation *He* offers through *His* death and resurrection brings about “a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew” (Colossians 3:11). *Jesus* is Lord of all!

Matthew estimated that *those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children*. If we include the *women and children*, the number of the crowd estimates to have been between eight and sixteen *thousand people*.

Matthew ends his account of this miracle by saying that after feeding the multitudes, *Jesus* sent *the crowds away and got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan*.

Magadan is a site on the Sea of Galilee. Mark refers to this place as “Dalmanutha” (Mark 8:10). Modern historians are unfamiliar with these names, but some speculate that it is the town of Magdala, located on the northwestern (Jewish) shore. Magdala means “tower.” Mary Magdalene

whom Jesus cast seven evil spirits out of was from Magdala (Luke 8:2). (See map in the Additional Resources section)

Biblical Text

15:32-39 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, “I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.” The disciples said to Him, “Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?” And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.