

# Bread, Fish and the Plan of God

See Mat 14:13-21; 15:32-39 and 16:5-12 with parallel passages in Mark, Luke and John

These passages are wonderfully prophetic in a pictorial way and their message is very pertinent to us. You know, the scriptures say, "...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev 19:10) That is, His life and words fulfilled prophecy and declared it. Let's look at the circumstances of each of these two miracles and then I'll give some suggestions for you to consider.

In the first case (Mat 14), Jesus was trying to get some quiet time, but when people found out where He was headed they followed on foot from the surrounding cities. *"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick." When it got late, His disciples wanted Him to send the crowd away to find food. "But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish.' He said, 'Bring them here to Me.' Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained."*

In the parallel passages, we learn that the place was nearby the town

of Bethsaida, that the people followed Him because they saw His miracles, that Philip thought 200 denarii (a denarii being an average day's wage) was barely sufficient to buy enough to give everyone a little bread. Also, they mention that the Passover, a feast of the Jews was near, that the five loaves were barley loaves, that the people were told to sit down on the grass in groups of 100s and 50s. In addition, Jesus said, "Gather the fragments so that nothing is lost." There were about 5000 men in the crowd and the Lord saw them as sheep not having a shepherd. Also, in response to the miracle, the people said, "This is the Prophet...". Afterwards, Jesus departed the scene and went up a mountain alone.

In the second case (Mat 15), they were on the other side of the sea of Galilee in a more 'gentile-ish' region. Jesus healed many people and the multitude marveled "and they glorified the God of Israel."

*"Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continue with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.' Then His disciples said to Him, 'Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves do you have?' And they said, 'Seven, and a few little fish.' And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those*

*who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat and came to the region of Magdala."*

In parallel passages we learn that in the crowd, "some of them [had] come from afar." Also, Jesus gave thanks for the bread and blessed the little fish.

Now, the key symbols to note are the:

- Setting
- Bread
- Fish
- Baskets
- People
- Commands
- Following actions

The setting of the first case was in the area of Bethsaida, a primarily Jewish area. Again, Jesus acted out of compassion because the people were like sheep without a shepherd. Also, the Jewish feast of Passover was near and money was the only solution the disciple Philip could fathom. The setting of the second case was in a place populated with more gentiles. The people had followed Jesus for three days and some of them had come from far away.

Bread is symbolic of the Word of God. You can refer to Deut 8:3; Mat 4:4; Ex 16:4, Psa 78:24; Isa 55:10,11 and John 6:31-33, 50,51,58 as examples. Jesus is the Word of God. In both cases the bread was broken and in both cases the bread was first given to the servants of the Lord and then they distributed it to the crowds. In the first case, there were five barley loaves. In the second case, there were seven non-descript loaves.

Fish can be symbolic of men in the scripture. You can refer to Hab 1:14; Mat 4:19 and Mk 1:17 as examples. We should note that these fish are associated with the bread. In the first case, there were two fish, but the Greek word used is opsarion which generally refers to fish that are cooked or about to be cooked. In the second case, there were a few little fish – that is, the number was not important but their size was – little. The Greek word used is ichthudion – little fish -- as opposed to ictus which simply means fish.

Baskets are symbolic of periods of time. In their first mention in scripture, Joseph interpreted them as meaning days – see Gen 40:18. In the first case, there were 12 baskets full of fragments gathered 'so that nothing would be lost'. The Greek word used is kophinos – simply a nondescript basket. In the second case, there were 7 large baskets of fragments gathered. The Greek word used is spuris, a large hamper sized basket. This word comes from the word meaning to sow or scatter seed. It is the same word used for the basket Paul was let down in while being saved from getting killed in Damascus.

The people are symbolic in a couple of ways. First, they were eating or consuming. As such they can correlate to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream where he stated that the cattle and the ears of corn that consumed their counterparts in the dream were years. Secondly, they are the recipients of Christ's gracious repasts. In the first case, there were about 5000 men besides women and children who came to Jesus. They came because they were fascinated by the miracles they saw, but later

when they were confronted with the difficult truth about eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, they forsook Him. They were ordered to sit down in ranks or groups of 50. In the second case, there were about 4000 men along with women and children. When they were fed, they glorified the God of Israel, some coming from far away, and they continued with Jesus for three days.

As for commands from Jesus, in the first case the people were commanded to sit. Afterwards, He commanded His disciples to depart over the sea. In the second case, the people were also commanded to sit.

Following the first case, the people saw Jesus as the Prophet whom Moses had foretold. Jesus left these people and went up a mountain out of sight. Later, as mentioned above, Christ reproved them for only thinking of their bellies and they then rejected his teaching. Following the second case, Jesus went to the area of Dalmanutha, specifically Magdala.

Let's now consider the interpretation of these symbols and consequently the message of these events as a prophetic picture orchestrated by Christ.

Jointly, these miracles illustrate the ministry of God's Word to and through His children – Jew and Gentile. Consider the settings – The first location was primarily Jewish and the second was significantly gentilish. This order makes sense historically and theologically - see Rom 1:16. In the first, Jesus saw the crowd as sheep without a shepherd. Num 27:15-18 says: "Then Moses spoke to the

*LORD, saying: 'Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.' And the LORD said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;'"* Moses was concerned that Israel would indeed be shepherdless so God said, "Give them Joshua" (same name as Jesus).

In many other places, the Jewish people are specifically identified with sheep. See 1 Kings 22:17; Eze 34:12; Zech 13:7; Mat 9:36; Mark 14:27 as examples. In rejecting Jesus, they have indeed been Shepherdless for the last two millennia.

It is also specifically mentioned that in the first setting the Passover, a feast of the Jews was near. Each of these things points to a setting that pictures the Jewish people.

In the second setting, it was said that the people followed Jesus for three days. Of course, the number three points to the resurrection for Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. It also says that many came from very far away. Indeed, the mostly gentile church has followed Jesus because of the resurrection and is made up of people from every far away tribe and tongue on the earth.

As for the bread, in both cases it was broken and clearly this speaks to the broken body of Christ. It was passed from Christ to the disciples and from the disciples to the people sitting down. This is indeed how the Word of God has come to us –

divinely inspired people recorded it, and it has then been passed to us to 'eat'. The scripture says concerning the Word that, "...prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet 1:21)

Now, the loaves in the first setting were specifically of barley and there were five of them. Barley is associated with the Jewish law in that it was used as part of the process to sanctify a field to the Lord. It is interesting that the people in this setting were commanded to sit in groups of 50 for Lev 27:16 specifies that the sanctification process for this field included a valuation of a homer of barley at 50 shekels. It says, "If a man dedicates to the LORD part of a field of his possession, then your valuation shall be according to the seed for it. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver." This number fifty is associated with the Jubilee which is a beautiful picture of Jesus but is also a celebration that the Jews never fully observed – at least it is not recorded.

Now, there were five loaves. Is there a number five associated with the law of God? Certainly. The Law of God, as a group, is identified with the five books of Moses, the Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As many of you know, five also speaks of grace in the Bible. This fits our prophetic picture as well for the scripture says, "For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

In the second setting, there were seven non-descript loaves. As the mostly gentile church is not under the Law of Moses, the non-descript

nature is appropriate. How about the number seven? Again, as with the number five, the number seven is associated with a theme in scripture – completion. I'll suggest that this pictures the complete or full revelation of God's Word. Whereas the Jews have for a time been blinded to the truth of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, the fullness of this awesome message has been revealed to the Church. This also points to the fact that the scriptures as they have been passed to us in the form of Old and New Testaments are complete and should be passed on to the congregation that way. As the apostle Paul wrote, "I have not shunned to declare to you the **whole counsel of God.**" (Acts 20:27) Adding to or taking away from the seven loaves so to speak is not how Jesus fed the people; neither should we.

Next, we have the fish that are closely associated with the bread. In the first case, there were two fish, two 'opsarion'. In order to understand this, we should ask how the Jewish people have traditionally viewed their scriptures and whether there are two men who stand out as representative of them. Here's what the Bible says:

- "Do not think that I came to destroy the **Law** or the **Prophets**. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Mat 5:17)
- "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the **Law** and the **Prophets.**" (Mat 7:12)
- "For all the **prophets** and the **law** prophesied until John." (Mat 11:13)
- "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of

whom Moses in the **law**, and also the **prophets**, wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:45)

- “And after the reading of the **Law** and the **Prophets**, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” (Acts 13:15)
- But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the **Law** and in the **Prophets**. (Acts 24:14)
- “But now the righteousness of God apart from the **law** is revealed, being witnessed by the **Law** and the **Prophets**,” (Rom 3:21)

Clearly, the segmentation of the OT which the Bible itself uses is the **Law** and the **Prophets**. These two are represented by Moses and Elijah who by the way were the two men who met with Jesus upon the mount of transfiguration. Now, they are also referred to as opsarion – fish that are cooked or about to be cooked. Fish in the fire...hmm. You know the Tribulation and the last days in general are referred to in the Bible many times as a time of fiery trial. (Isa 66:15,16; Eze 39:6; Joel 2:30; Zeph 3:8; Zech 13:9) Could it be that these two will be the two witnesses of Rev 11? Some people expect that Enoch will be one of these two. We'll see.

In the second setting, we have a few little fish, a few ichthudion. And consistent with the prophetic picture there were indeed a few 'little' men who are associated with the NT –

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter (and the writer of Hebrews if you don't think it was Paul). Why little? Let's see what the Bible says:

- “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as **little** children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 18:3)
- “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this **little** child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 18:4)
- “**Little** children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.” (John 13:33)
- “My **little** children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,” (Gal 4:19)
- “I write to you, **little** children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” (1 John 2:12)

The point is, you have to be 'little' to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to receive and pass along the truth of God's message – salvation in Jesus. In fact, the name Paul means “little”.

Now for the baskets. In the first case, we have 12 baskets. We need to keep in mind that these baskets contained the bread and that they prophetically represent some period of time. Was there a period of time in which a group of twelve held the bread, the Word of God? Sure. The twelve tribes of Israel – the ones to whom Jesus said He was sent (Mat 15:24). And just as He told the disciples to gather the fragments so that none would be lost, this is representative of how precious the Word is – each scrap if you would.

Concerning Samuel the prophet it is written, “So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and **let none of his words fall to the ground.**”

Also, the principle of losing nothing applies to Christ's concern for His sheep. The scripture records concerning Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane: “Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,’ that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You gave Me I have **lost none.**’” (John 18:7-9)

And so even today, God is not done in reaching out to the Jewish people. In due season, **all Israel** will be saved (Rom 11:26).

In the second case, we have a group of seven baskets which hold the bread or Word of God. Is there a group of seven during the NT times that have held the Word? Sure. The church as represented in Revelation. The seven churches which represent the entirety of the church or church age. In fact, it is said of the church of Philadelphia, “...you have a **little strength**, have kept (to attend to carefully) My word...” It is also interesting to note that the word for these baskets is, as mentioned above, spuris. It comes from the word meaning to scatter seed. This is clearly appropriate for this has been the charge of the church – to scatter the seed of God's Word, to spread the Gospel around the world. It is also appropriate that it is the same type of basket in which Paul was saved from death for this is the message of the bread we spread abroad – salvation from death,

eternal life in Christ.

Now the baskets as we've seen represent a period of time but how much? This is where the people fit in. As we mentioned above, they can each represent, consistent with scripture, a year. In the first case, we have about 5000 people or about 5000 years. We should ask, is there a period of about 5000 years that the 12 tribes of Israel have been ministered to with the Word of God? Sure. God first spoke to Abraham, the first Jew, about 2000 years before the birth of Christ. Since then, it has been another 2000 years or so, and if Christ comes quite soon, as we expect, and reigns with the Jews as priests (see Eze 40 – 48) for 1000 years as prophesied, that makes about 5000 years.

The people in the first case, came to Jesus because of the miracles they saw Him do but deserted Him when He told them it was He Himself they must consume. In like manner the Jews have always sought after signs (see 1 Cor 1:22) but rejected the principle of salvation through Christ Jesus. Sitting in groups of 50 should have reminded the people of the principle of Jubilee which was to be celebrated each 50 years. In that year, debts were cancelled, slaves were set free, everyone returned to their home or possession and there was to be no oppression – hey, this is what Jesus is all about, isn't it? (see Lev 25)

In the second case, we have about 4000 people. Is there a period of about 4000 years in which God has spoken to the gentile world and ministered His Word through the mostly gentile church? Sure. Now, keep in mind that we are letting the Bible interpret itself so it doesn't

matter how long ago you think Adam and Eve were created. The Bible itself specifies that from the creation of Adam until the call of Abram to leave Haran was 2021 years. You can do the math yourself. During this time, there were no Jews, the world was all gentile if you would. Add to this the approximately 2000 years of the church age and you have about 4000 years. Now, you may ask, "What about the millennium?" Recall that the church is referred to as the Bride of Christ and will literally be married to Him before the millennium. During this time, the Bible says we will be one with Him, ruling with Him but at home in Heaven. We will know Him even as we are known (see 1 Cor 13:12). He will not be feeding us in the same manner as when we were earth-bound. Praise God!

Next, Christ's commands to each group. To both He directed to sit down which indicates rest. In like manner, to receive nourishment from the Lord your soul must be at rest. Take that quiet time each day. Learn to sit at the Lord's feet and listen. Also, it was away from that group that Jesus commanded His disciples to leave. This typifies the movement of His church away from the legalism of the OT Law. Additionally, the disciples were commanded to go over the sea and as many of you Bible students know, the sea is a type or picture in scripture of the gentile nations. In type, Jesus sent His disciples away from the Jews to cover the gentile world with the Gospel. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And of Paul it is recorded, "On the next

*Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,*

*That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*

*Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region." (Act 13:44 – 49)*

Following the first miracle feeding, Jesus left the crowd and went up out of sight. The people thought He might be "the Prophet" but later rejected Him altogether. This is consistent with the picture for the Jews as a group indeed rejected Jesus though some of them have regarded Him as a prophet. After coming to them, He departed to heaven but before He left He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the **prophets** and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall **see Me no more** till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Mat 23:39)

Also, just as He reproved them for

coming after Him simply because they were fed by the loaves and fish, the scripture says, "The righteous **eats to the satisfying of his soul**, but the **stomach** of the wicked shall be **in want**." (Pro 13:25)

Following the second miracle feeding, Jesus went to Magdala the town of Mary Magdalene. As stated above, the people had followed Him for three days which recall points in type to the resurrection; they then received the miracle feeding. This portrays wonderfully exactly what happened for it was **after** His **resurrection** that the disciples believed Him – that is, truly received His Word and the first person He met was **Mary Magdalene** there in the garden.

So it would seem that in His testimony, His words and life, Jesus was indeed broadcasting the magnificent plan of God in feeding and redeeming His children both Jew and gentile. Of course, we have to 'sit down' to receive it. In this day in which we see around us the increasing fulfillment of Paul's declaration to Timothy, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Tim 3:13) it is comforting to know that God's plan and purpose are unaffected by the world's moral and spiritual decline.

But we do have to **beware** of the increasing amount of false teaching in this time. After the second miraculous feeding, (Mat 16:5-12) the disciples forgot their bread. (May we **never** leave the Word of God behind!) Here's what happened:

*"Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, 'Take heed and **beware** of the*

*leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have taken no bread.' But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, 'O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet **understand**, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?— but to beware of the **leaven** of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the **doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"*

Dear friends and loved ones, there are many other fascinating parts of this prophetic picture we could consider. However, what I want to leave you with is this -- in this day there are so many even within the church who are finding new ways to entice believers into leaving the bread of God and are falling for the doctrine of false teachers – contemporary counterparts to those Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day. What they are peddling is not true bread but leaven, which typifies sin in the Bible. Now leaven puffs up bread and makes it look more impressive size wise. In like manner, some of these folks sound impressive at first but I pray we will all have sufficient discernment to recognize the leaven and avoid it. I urge you emphatically, stick to the Word or get back to the Word. We are close, very close – His picture is nearly complete.