

Exegetical Notes, John 6:1-14 “5000”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

John 6:1-14

Verses 1-4

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

- After his visit to Jerusalem in Judea (see chapter 5), Jesus returned north to Galilee. This story takes place on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee. At its widest point, the Sea of Galilee was about 5 miles wide. When Jesus crossed to the far shore of the sea, he would have been going from the western shore to the eastern shore.
- Jesus was, apparently, not crossing the sea at its widest point. Large crowds followed the progress of his boat by land, and Jesus could see the crowd following him on the shore.
- They followed him because they had seen him do miracles of healing. John always describes these miracles as signs. He wants us to understand that their purpose was in what they showed Jesus to be. They were signs that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Their purpose was, therefore, greater than just the healings that occurred.
- As Jesus saw the crowd approaching, he took his disciples up onto a hill and sat down. He was preparing to receive those he could see coming to him. Sitting was the teaching posture of rabbis. The indication, then, is that Jesus was prepared to teach a great lesson.
- The crowds may have been people on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover as the text mentions that that feast was near at hand.

Verses 5-9

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages^[a] to buy enough

bread for each one to have a bite!”⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

- As Jesus watched the crowd approaching him, he said to Philip, one of the twelve, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” The text said that Jesus did this to “test” Philip. Jesus already knew that feeding such a large crowd of people was physically impossible for his disciples to do. There was no place there to buy bread, and they did not have enough money to do so even if there had been a place to do it. Jesus knew those facts. He put the question to Philip so as to allow him to teach the great lesson he intended to teach.
- Philip’s answer only confirmed what was obvious. It would take too much money to feed these people. They did not have sufficient resources to do it.
- Andrew, another of the twelve, then stepped up saying that there was a boy in the crowd with five barley rolls and two fish. But, Andrew recognized that this lunch would never feed so many people.

Verses 10-11

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

- Jesus then told the twelve to have all the people sit down on the grass. There were about 5000 men, plus women and children in the crowd. Perhaps there were as many as 10,000 people there that day.
- Jesus then took the little boy’s lunch and thanked God for it, though it was far too little to satisfy the need.
- He then told the disciples to pass the lunch to the crowd.

Verses 12-14

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

- The five rolls and two fish expanded to become enough food to fill the crowd’s hunger. There was “enough” food to satisfy everyone in the crowd.

- When the leftovers were collected, there were twelve baskets full of them. It is suggested that, to their amazement, each one of the twelve had his own basket full at the end of the meal.
- While the scholars often draw lessons from this story about Jesus' ability to provide for us abundantly even from a meager supply, in John's Gospel the significance of the miracle is that it is a sign of who Jesus is. (See John 5:36) The purpose of the miracle is to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. Those seeing the sign got the point. They concluded that Jesus was a "great prophet who had come into the world." This was the lesson that Jesus intended to teach.

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