

JOHN 6

John 6:1–15

After the scene in Jerusalem (John 5), the setting shifts abruptly to Galilee. This is a feature of the episodic nature of the Gospel of John, and the miracle that ensues is the only miracle Jesus performs that is recorded in all four Gospels. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), John does not mention any teaching—the crowd comes to Jesus for an unspecified reason. To emphasize Jesus’s divine foreknowledge, the narrator explains that His question to Philip is posed as a test.

The mention of Passover (verse 4) introduces a number of themes associated with the festival in this passage (sacred meals, reclining to eat, remembering the deliverance from Egypt) and points forward to the events in the last week of Jesus’s life. Since the Gospel of John omits the institution of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, this miracle may also be seen as an echo of that holy ordinance. The careful counting of the surplus in verse 13 demonstrates Jesus’s divine power to more than provide for all our needs.

Although not everybody present is aware of the miracle that has taken place (see 6:26) those who have seen the multiplication are duly impressed and, not incorrectly, connect Jesus with the figure prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15–18 (the prophet like unto Moses). Incorrectly, however, they assume that this messianic figure will lead them in a rebellion against Rome. The King James Version accurately captures the violence behind the Greek *harpazō*, indicating that they would “take him *by force*” to make him king. In the dramatic irony that is typical of the Gospel of John, Jesus is indeed a king, but His “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Jesus has no time for this messianic drama and escapes His would-be coronation.

John 6:16–21

In the confusion that follows Jesus’s departure, His disciples decide to head back to Capernaum without Jesus. Perhaps they expect to meet Jesus on the shore. The scene that follows is yet another revelation of

Jesus's divine power. As did the God of the Old Testament, Jesus demonstrates His power over the turbulent waters, a symbol of chaos and death. His words, "It is I," are another manifestation of this power; in Greek, they are *egō eimi*, the same self-identifier that Jehovah gives in Exodus 3:14. The implication is clear: Jesus is the divine Jehovah and holds the same power over the deep as He did anciently.

John 6:22–29

The assembled crowd, who saw Jesus's disciples depart without Him, is confused to see that Jesus too is now gone, and they immediately start searching for Him. While such effort in the search for Jesus is commendable, when they find Jesus, He questions their motivations. They do not care about His divine power (and its implications for them and their relationship with God); rather, they only recognize Him as a source of handouts. Jesus attempts to reorient them in verse 27, pointing them to the much more valuable everlasting life that He is willing to offer, and the crowd's response indicates some willingness to pursue this course. Verse 29 teaches us that personal trust in and willingness to follow Jesus is the fulfillment of all the work of God.

John 6:30–40

The crowd's request for a sign is jarring; Jesus has just multiplied food for them in a miraculous fashion. However, we should remember that this group of people may not be aware of the miracle that has taken place (see 6:26). However, requesting a sign is rarely a good idea scripturally. In response to this, Jesus does not perform another miracle but instead expounds the significance of the miracle He has already performed.

The crowd cites the Old Testament: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (this does not match any known verse of scripture and is probably a summary statement), and Jesus corrects them on two points. The provider of manna was not Moses—it was God—and He changes the tense of the verb from "gave" to "giveth," as God's daily providence for His children continues through the mediation of His Son Jesus Christ. Predictably, the crowd is interested in Jesus's offer of "the true bread from heaven" but probably does not anticipate Jesus's next statement: "*I am the bread of life.*" To consume the bread from heaven means nothing less than total acceptance of all Jesus is and says.

John 6:41–50

This is the first time in the Gospel of John that Galileans are referred to as "the Jews"—remember, in John, this term usually refers to members of the Jerusalem aristocracy who oppose Jesus, not to the

Jewish people as a whole. This designation indicates that this group may be hostile to Jesus, and their response shows disdain towards Jesus's lofty claim.

The point of Jesus's remark in verse 44 seems to be that human efforts at reconciliation with God, as well-intentioned as they may be, would all be for naught had God not taken the initiative in sending His Son and inspiring humanity to follow Him. Only the one who answers the divine call can approach Jesus in any meaningful way.

John 6:51–59

In verse 51, Jesus pushes His analogy even further by claiming that the bread is not just His essence but specifically His flesh—a veiled reference to His coming death. Seizing on the literal meaning of His words, His opponents decry the impossibility of such an offer. Rather than retreating from His forceful language, Jesus doubles down. His words are calculated to be shocking: the word for “eat” is not the normal one used in Greek (*esthiō*) but the raw, almost violent *trōgō*, meaning “to chew or gnaw.” Such jarring language forces the reader to come to terms with the meaning of Jesus's words. Nothing short of total acceptance of Jesus—including His violent, awful death—will suffice. Paradoxically, such an acceptance of death brings life; notice the theme in verse 57. While the terms “flesh” and “blood” can be used to signify the entirety of one's being, later readers (although probably not Jesus's immediate audience in the synagogue at Capernaum) can clearly see the sacramental significance of the imagery.

John 6:60–71

The reaction to Jesus's strong words is unsurprising. Even some of Jesus's disciples find the words difficult to bear. But Jesus does not back down from them; instead, He again asserts His divine origins. He has told the truth, and to act otherwise would be dishonest and a betrayal of His mission. His words can bring the hearer to eternal life, if only the hearer chooses to believe and act on them.

Such assertions, however, do not reassure those who are faltering. The total commitment demanded by Jesus proves to be too much for many, and some people abandon Him. From this point forward, controversy, not acceptance, will follow Jesus wherever He goes. Jesus's question to the Twelve (the first time they are mentioned in the Gospel of John) shows greater confidence in them, as the phrasing of the question in Greek anticipates an answer such as, “Of course not!” Peter's answer meets the challenge with an answer full of faith. Though trials and wavering doubts lie ahead, at this moment of decision Peter and the Twelve stand firm. Jesus responds favorably to this affirmation but also recognizes that such loyalty will not last forever—especially in the case of Judas, whose doubts may have already begun.

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