



The Gospel of John - Chapter Six

II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues)

II.c John 5:1-10:42 - Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

The chapter commences with the well known story where Jesus fed a crowd of thousands of people in a deserted place from just five loaves of bread and two small fish. John's account is unique in that it recounts the crowd trying to anoint Jesus as king in order that he would lead them in revolt against the Romans. Jesus slips away from the crowd to a quiet place of prayer.

In the absence of Jesus, the disciples start to row back across the Sea of Galilee but are met with a fierce storm which they had to battle against most of the night. Just before dawn Jesus came to them walking on the water, a terrifying experience for them but a further sign of his deity as he overcomes the forces of nature. Immediately after Jesus joined them in the boat they arrived on at their destination on the western side of the Sea.

The following day, somewhere between Gennesaret and Capernaum on the western side of the lake, Jesus was again joined by the crowd who had witnessed the miraculous feeding. Clearly trying to comprehend who Jesus was, they questioned him about what had happened but Jesus challenged them to realise that it was not food for nourishment they should seek but the bread from heaven sent by God for their salvation.

At some point, Jesus arrived in Capernaum and continued his teaching in the synagogue. Jesus stated that those who would eat and drink from him would not die as did their ancestors who received the manna in the wilderness, in fact they would never hunger or thirst again. But they challenged his claims to be from heaven as they knew his mother and father to be human. Jesus' teaching that they should eat his flesh and drink his blood, which they took as a literal call, caused controversy among them and they started to dispute his claims.

This teaching proved too hard for many of the disciples who turned away from Jesus. He then challenged the Twelve as to whether they too would leave but Peter, their spokesman, said they had nowhere else to go since Jesus was the one who was from God and offered eternal life. Jesus' response to this was to confirm that he had chosen them rather than the other way around although he knew that one of them, Judas Iscariot, would be his betrayer.

II.c.ii John 6:1-15 - Feeding the Five Thousand

The feeding of the multitude, which is recorded in all four Gospels: Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44 and Luke 9:10-17, constitutes another of Jesus' messianic signs. The sign shows that Jesus fulfils symbolism related to God's provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness through Moses.

This is one of the best known miracles performed by Jesus and is one of the few events to appear in detail in all four Gospel accounts. However, it was never intended to be just about feeding people or indeed to show how many could be so miraculously fed from such a small amount of food through its supernatural multiplication. Here was a lesson both for the disciples and for the crowd to show the power of God and to indicate that Jesus was their real food for life; their daily bread: *<<I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth>>* (Job 23:12), *<<Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need>>* (Proverbs 30:8), and: *<<Give us each day our daily bread>>* (Luke 11:3). This would indicate the total reliance that people should and could put on God for all their needs.

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

John 6:1

After this again indicates the passing of an unspecified period of time (5:1). As much as half a year may have passed since the previous event.

Jesus went to the other side. Matthew and Mark state they went to a solitary place, but Luke writes that it was at Bethsaida that the multitude was fed: *<<On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured>>* (Luke 9:10-11). It is likely that Bethsaida was their intended destination but that they had stopped at a more deserted location for a chance to rest and eat; it was here that the crowd found Jesus. This is confirmed by a different translation: *<<And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. And He took them and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida>>* (Luke 9:10 KJ21), which makes more sense with the rest of the account given in all four Gospels.

The Sea of Galilee is also called the Sea of Tiberias by John in 21:1. This lake, also known as the Kinneret, is fed from the Jordan to the north and spills out again to the Jordan in the south. It currently measures approximately 7 miles or 11.3km

wide, and 13 miles or 21km long. Archaeological discoveries in and around this lake include a 1st Century boat and excavations in various coastal cities, including Capernaum and Tiberias.

² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

John 6:2

A large crowd kept following him. By now Jesus' fame was spreading and people were flocking to him in great numbers. However, it was not because they believed he would bring them back to God or to hear the teaching of a great Rabbi, it was because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

John 6:3

The mountain may refer not to any specific mountain but to the hill country east of the lake, known today as the Golan Heights: *<<And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone>> (Matthew 14:23), and: <<After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray>> (Mark 6:46).*

Sat down there with his disciples. This was the normal posture that Jesus took when he was about to teach his followers, which was particularly noted at the start of the Sermon on the Mount:



Regional map showing the Golan Heights

<<When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him>> (Matthew 5:1).

⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

John 6:4

This is the second of three Passovers mentioned by John; 2:13 and 11:55 refer to the others, and is the only one during Jesus' ministry that finds him in Galilee.

⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?'

⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.'

John 6:5-7

He said this to test him. God often tests the hearts of those who profess to follow him. It was so with King Hezekiah: <<*So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart*>> (2 Chronicles 32:31), and King David even called on God to test him: <<*Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind*>> (Psalm 26:2). King Solomon wrote about such testing: <<*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart*>> (Proverbs 17:3), and: <<*I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals*>> (Ecclesiastes 3:18); as did Paul: <<*but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Six months' wages is two hundred denarii in the Greek and would be more accurately translated as thirty three weeks wages, since one denarius was about one day's pay for a labourer, who would typically work a six day week: <<*After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard*>> (Matthew 20:2),



A Denarius of Tiberius Caesar

where the Greek is denarius for daily wage, and: <<*Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?*>> (John 12:5), which is also recorded as a year's wages: <<*Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages*>> (John 12:5 NIV).

However, Philip's sentiment is clear, even this large sum of money would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little, so how could this itinerant Rabbi and his small band of disciples possibly hope to feed so many people?

⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,
⁹ 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?'

John 6:8-9

Barley was common food for the poor but the more well-to-do preferred wheat bread. The two fish were probably dried or preserved, possibly pickled. This type of picnic lunch would probably have been typical to sustain one person on a day's journey.

¹⁰ Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all.

¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he

distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

John 6:10-11

Although John says there were about five thousand, other accounts indicate the crowd to be even larger: <<***And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children***>> (Matthew 14:21), thereby totalling somewhere between 10-20,000 people. Whatever the true size of the crowd, this was a large multitude that needed to be fed from a very small amount of food!

Jesus took the loaves. God often takes what people bring as an offering to him, multiplies it and then puts it to good use, either for the benefit of the giver or to others in greater need.

When he had given thanks. Even while he performs this great miracle, Jesus offers up thanks to his Father, who is the provider of everything. This is a demonstration of the type of thankful heart that everyone should have, recognising all that God provides for his creation.

He distributed them to those who were seated. Other accounts indicate that it was through the disciples that Jesus distributed the food: <<***Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all***>> (Mark 6:41). This is typical of the way God works for he tends to use ordinary people to undertake his good provenance.

As much as they wanted. Jesus provided not just what the people needed to sustain them but enough to satisfy what they wanted. God had performed a similar miracle, albeit on a smaller scale, through the hands of Elisha: <<***A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.' But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left."***>> (2 Kings 4:42-44).

¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.'¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

John 6:12-14

Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost. Jesus trusted that God's provision would always be available when it was needed, but like most moralists he refused to squander what was available. The extra bread, which was more than the amount started with, could be used for other meals. The explicit

mention of twelve baskets full left over may symbolise the 12 tribes of Israel, as well as the lavish abundance of God's provision. In the desert there was no manna left over as it was to be provided each day: *<<And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any of it over until morning.' But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted>>* (Exodus 16:19-21), whereas this miracle was a rare occurrence for a different purpose, teaching his disciples to have faith in him for what they need, when they truly need it.

This idea of the abundance of God's provision for those who return to him is also reflected in the Parable of the Prodigal: *<<But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!>>* (Luke 15:17).

The Prophet. The people here see Jesus as fulfilling the prediction of a prophet like Moses who was promised in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18:18, as commented on in John 1:20-21. In: *<<Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people">>* (Acts 3:22-23) Peter identifies Jesus as the fulfilment of this prophecy. However, prophet is not a common title for Jesus and is more often used by those who know little about him: *<<Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'>>* (Matthew 16:13-14), and: *<<The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet'>>* (John 4:19), since Jesus is much more than a prophet. Some in Judaism and all of Islam still believe that Jesus was no more than a prophet, although he is highly exalted in their faith.

¹⁵ When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

John 6:15

To make him king. Jesus did not want to be pushed into the middle of an unruly mob that would march to begin a futile, spontaneous uprising against the Roman authorities. The people did not understand that Jesus' kingship at his First Coming was spiritual, something that Jesus later confirms to Pilate: *<<Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here'>>* (John 18:36).

He withdrew again to the mountain by himself. This is confirmed in the Synoptics although they report that Jesus had dismissed his disciples first: *<<Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray>>* (Mark 6:45-46).

II.c.iii John 6:16-21 - Jesus Walks on the Water

Although not explicit in this account, Jesus instructed his disciples to sail on ahead of him across the Lake while he spent time in prayer alone. Early in the morning, while they were still battling the elements out at sea, Jesus went out to join them by walking on the water. Initially, they thought he was a ghostly apparition but soon realised it was their Lord and accepted him into their boat.

Although his healings and provision of food were miracles, some might have seen these as the work of a magician. However, to have the power over nature to walk on the surface of the lake during a storm was something that was only in the domain of God: <<who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea>> (Job 9:8), <<Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen>> (Psalm 77:19), and: <<You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters>> (Habakkuk 3:15).

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

John 6:16-17

A boat, dated from around or before the 1st Century AD by radiocarbon analysis and associated pottery, was found in the Sea of Galilee south of Kibbutz Ginnosar in 1986. It is consistent with boat representations in mosaics from Migdal or Magdala, also on the Sea of Galilee. Approximately 26.5 feet long and 7.5 feet wide, or 8m by 2.3m, it could hold about 15 people, including four rowers and a helmsman. It probably had both fore and aft decks and a central mast and sail, with positions for two sets of oars on both sides. See the image.



Although Capernaum was their intended destination, according to Matthew 14:36 they actually landed at nearby Gennesaret, a short distance to the southwest.

¹⁸ The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

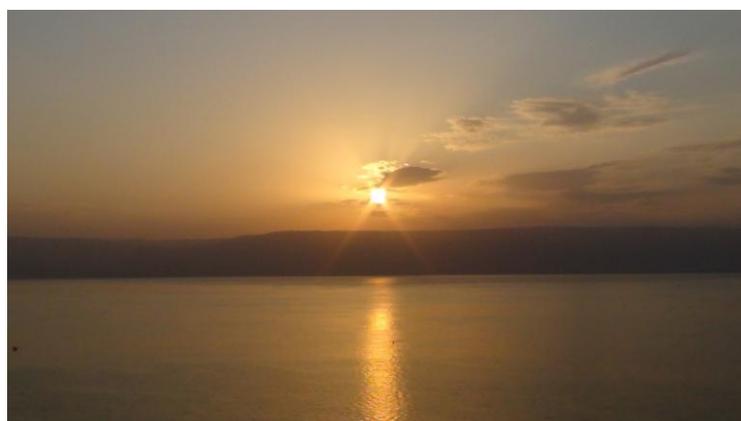
John 6:18-19

The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. The Sea of Galilee is 696 feet or 212m below sea level, and is prone to violent downdrafts and sudden storms. The fishermen amongst them would have been used to such storms, although it was not uncommon for some to lose their lives in the worst of storms. This seemed to be one such storm, similar to the one recorded in Mark 4:35-41, when Jesus calmed the storm that had threatened their lives.

They had rowed about three or four miles. If the feeding of the multitude took place at the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the shortest distance to Capernaum would be 5-6 miles or 8-10km.

They saw Jesus walking on the lake. This is the only occasion recorded in John where Jesus reveals his power and authority over nature. As already mentioned, the Synoptics do reveal other occasions, one of them on this very lake: <<*One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.'* So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'>> (Luke 8:22-25). God had revealed this power in the account of Jonah: <<*Then they cried out to the Lord, 'Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.'* So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows>> (Jonah 1:14-16). Walking on the sea is not something Jesus did just to amaze the disciples, but rather it is a powerful, visible demonstration of Jesus' sovereignty over the world that he created: <<*He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word*>> (Hebrews 1:3a). In the OT, God alone rules over the seas: <<*The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever*>> (Psalm 29:10), <<*You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them*>> (Psalm 89:9), and: <<*Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven*>> (Psalm 107:28-30).

They were terrified. Rowing such a distance into the teeth of the storm would have taken much of the night and it was probably just before dawn, when the sky and the sea were black that Jesus came to them. Yet this was a real event, not the imagination of an individual or a vision at night.



The Sea of Galilee at Dawn

²⁰ But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’

John 6:20

Jesus’ words **It is I**, represent the Greek phrase *egō eimi*, which in other contexts can be translated ‘I am’. Here it may allude to God’s self-identification as: <<**I am who I am**>> (Exodus 3:14b), and may thus be an indication of Jesus’ divinity. This connection becomes clearer when the phrase is repeated in later verses.

Do not be afraid. God has always tried to reassure his people in their fearful moments. For example: <<**After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great’**>> (Genesis 15:1), <<**Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed**>> (1 Chronicles 22:13), <<**and he said, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you”**>> (Acts 27:24). However, fear of God is healthy for: <<**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge**>> (Proverbs 1:7a), and he is the only one that a believer needs to fear for he is the true and just judge: <<**I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!**>> (Luke 12:4-5).

²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

John 6:21

Immediately the boat reached the land is a miraculous instance of what is taught in Psalm 107:23-32, especially vv.29-30, as already quoted (vv.18-19). God alone stills the storm, and he is the one who brings those who travel the sea safely to their destination.

II.c.iv John 6:22-59 - The Bread from Heaven

Jesus has claimed to share God’s prerogatives of life-giving and judgment, and has demonstrated supernatural power. Now the claims made in Chapter 5 and the power demonstrated so far in this chapter are put in perspective through the series of teachings around the theme of the bread of life. The deeds of power are signs of something even more wondrous than the witnesses first thought, for Jesus speaks further of his role as the giver of eternal life and of how people are to share in this life he offers. The crowd’s response to this teaching illustrates the judgment that is taking place through Jesus’ ministry. In these verses John reveals more of the relation between the Father and the Son spoken of in the keynote address (5:24-29).

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the lake saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had

gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

John 6:22-24

This opening verses mark a transitional section. The crowd had witnessed a miraculous event in the feeding, they had seen Jesus' disciples go away alone in the only boat that was there and that Jesus had not left with them. Therefore, they became aware that something else unusual had occurred.

Tiberias. This was the leading and largest city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and was founded early in the 1st Century by Herod Antipas in honour of his patron, the Roman emperor Tiberius (AD14-37); it subsequently continued as the Galilæan royal city under King Agrippa I (AD39-44). The city was built upon an old cemetery, and thus was considered unclean by many Jews until the 2nd Century, when it became the centre of Palestinian rabbinic Judaism. The ancient city boasts a rich archæological heritage, including evidence of a 1st Century city gate, although many of the exposed structures are from a period just after the NT, such as the 2nd Century basilica and theatre, the 4th Century synagogue and nearby bath complex, and many Byzantine ruins from the 4th-7th Century AD. While Capernaum is located on the north-western edge of the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias is several miles to the south.

John draws attention to the fact that Jesus' departure the night before had been unusual in order to aid understanding of the feeding miracle. Boats from Tiberias arrive near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. The additional phrase after the Lord had given thanks seems unnecessary and is, indeed, omitted in some manuscripts. However, its presence puts Jesus at the centre of attention. The people had eaten, but the Lord's gracious activity had preceded this miracle. And the specific action John focuses on, Jesus' giving thanks, speaks of the relationship between the Son and the Father, and of the Son's dependency. It also shows Jesus acting in the family role of a father at a meal. So this brief clause touches on the deepest revelation about Jesus in this Gospel, the relation between the Father and the Son, and it also speaks of Jesus as the agent of God's gracious provision.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' ²⁶ Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

John 6:25-26

Rabbi, when did you come here? As is often the case in this Gospel, people call Jesus Rabbi but they do not treat him like one for they do not abide by his teaching. The question surrounding his journey is when but should perhaps have been 'how'. They knew there was something unusual in the way that Jesus had

somehow slipped away unnoticed (v.22), but they failed to notice that Jesus himself was indeed 'unusual'.

But because you ate your fill of the loaves implies that people were seeking Jesus only for the physical or material benefit that he gave, whereas they should have sought him because they saw signs, that is, miraculous signs that pointed to Jesus' divine nature and identity as the true Messiah.

²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' ²⁸ Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' ²⁹ Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'

John 6:27-29

Do not work for the food that perishes. The crowd had seen a miracle, but it did not focus their attention on Jesus. Rather, he was seen as a means to the filling of their stomachs (v.26). Jesus did not come to fill stomachs with food, but to fill lives with the very presence of God, as he will make clear in this dialogue. The people may have recognised an allusion to the words of the prophet in this statement by Jesus: <<*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food*>> (Isaiah 55:2).

Set his seal. A seal made of wax, clay, or various kinds of soft metal would signify either ownership or authentication of an item or a document; the second sense is probably in view here. God has not set a seal of approval here but a seal of ownership: <<*But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment*>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

What must we do to perform the works of God? This is a question that many believers will have asked themselves throughout the church age. Many would think of God's work as acting morally or doing evangelism or apologetics or even worship. As important as all of these are, Jesus goes to the heart of the matter, to the source from which all of these vital aspects of eternal life flow: belief in the one sent by God. Without this faith none of these activities are of benefit to anyone in real terms.

This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. John confirms this in a letter: <<*And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us*>> (1 John 3:23). Jesus tells them to work for the food that endures to eternal life, but the people misunderstand Jesus' statement and ask about the works required by God. Jesus replies that the work God requires is that people believe in the Messiah.

³⁰ So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?’

John 6:30

What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? These are amazing questions, for this crowd is actually willing to entertain the possibility that Jesus is in the same league as Moses. The Samaritan woman was willing to consider the possibility that Jesus is greater than Jacob, and in this faith she was brought closer to him. This crowd seems to have a similar willingness, but the results will not be as good.

What should be noted here is that the verbs in the Greek are in the present and not the future tense. Therefore the crowd is not asking for yet another sign to be given to them, but rather they want an interpretation of the feeding they have so recently witnessed for themselves. However, some of the religious leaders did want to see more signs to authenticate Jesus’ claims: <<*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you’*>> (Matthew 12:38).

³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”

John 6:31

Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness is a reference to the time when God sustained the entire Hebrew nation during years of wandering in a barren land. Yet the provision of bread from heaven was meant to signify not simply the satisfaction of Israel’s physical needs but also that their whole lives were to be sustained by the Lord and governed by his word.

He gave them bread from heaven to eat. The OT reference seems to involve several passages, with Psalm 78:23-24 being the most prominent; refer also to Exodus 16:4 and 16:15, Nehemiah 9:15, and Psalm 105:40. The passage sustains links with:

1. The Exodus and Passover motifs.
2. The characterisation of Jesus as the Prophet like Moses.
3. The expectation that God would provide manna once again in the messianic age.

³² Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.’ ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ³⁴ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

John 6:32-34

The inference of v.31 is that the crowd had rightly identified Jesus as their new king (v.15) and that he should let them get on with the coronation. Jesus’ response

follows a pattern familiar in rabbinic teaching styles. Jesus corrects what he understands to be their interpretation of the Scripture just cited. He who gave them bread from heaven was not Moses but my Father, and the giving of the true bread was not past, i.e. has given, but present, he who gives you the true bread from heaven. The claims implied in these changes are astonishing. He is not claiming to be the giver of bread like Moses. Rather, he focuses their attention of the real giver, God.

By once again identifying God as my Father, Jesus is making himself and his relationship with God the defining expression of God.

The true bread from heaven would be something that nourishes people eternally and spiritually, and thus is infinitely superior to the manna given to Israel in OT times, which was able to meet only temporal, physical needs. Jesus identifies himself as this true bread in v.35.

By telling this Jewish crowd that the Father gives you this bread and then saying that it gives life to the world, Jesus includes this Jewish crowd in the world. Salvation in Jesus does indeed come *from* the Jews (4:22), but it is also *for* the Jews. Recent ‘two-covenant theology’, which asserts that God saves Jews through his covenant with them apart from Jesus the Christ, is not in accord with the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Sir, give us this bread always. The crowd wants an unending supply of this bread, perhaps like the Samaritan woman wanted a continuous supply of water so she would not have to go to the well again (4:15). Once the crowd realises that he is referring to himself, however, they become far less receptive (v.41)!

³⁵ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

John 6:35-36

Jesus’ claim, ‘I am the bread of life’, constitutes the first of seven ‘I am’ sayings recorded in this Gospel. Apart from these sayings there are also several absolute statements where Jesus refers to himself as ‘I am’, in keeping with the reference to God as ‘I am’ in Exodus 3:14 and the book of Isaiah: <<*I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins*>> (Isaiah 43:25). Jesus is the bread of life in the sense that he nourishes people spiritually and satisfies the deep spiritual longings of their souls. In that sense, those who trust in him shall not hunger; that is, their spiritual longing to know God will be satisfied. Refer to the comments on John 4:14 for a similar discussion of Jesus satisfying people’s spiritual thirst with living water.

A list of the ‘I am’ statements in John is included in the [Supplementary Material on the website](#).

Whoever comes to me again confirms the universal ministry of Jesus. His offer of salvation to those who call on his name will be accepted, although there are conditions: <<*But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: ‘The*

Lord knows those who are his', and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness'>> (2 Timothy 2:19).

Will never be hungry, will never be thirsty. Jesus goes further than he did with the Samaritan woman, offering to satisfy spiritual hunger as well as thirst. Also, he is no longer speaking privately with an individual but publically to a crowd. Just as he did with the religious opponents (5:40), he is calling the people to him. They have already expended some effort to be with him but Jesus requires still more, he requires a step of faith, one that is taken in truth.

You have seen me and yet do not believe. The crowd saw his sign (v.26), but it did not function as a sign for them. They saw him with their physical eyes, but they did not have the faith that sees the revelation of the Father in what Jesus was doing. Therefore, they do not qualify for the benefits Jesus has just spelled out. By revealing their condition to them Jesus is exercising the judgment that is part of his job description (5:22). The light comes and reveals not only God's presence but also the state of the human heart.

³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

John 6:37-38

Everything that the Father gives me will come to me. A question that has taxed people for two thousand years is 'how do I know if I am chosen by God for everlasting life?' The answer from Scripture seems to be that Jesus will accept all those who choose to place their faith in him to be reconciled to God. Predestination seems to be more a case that God knows who those people will be rather than rejecting people based on who they are. A believer's job is to receive, trusting him for both the ability to receive and the obedience that is part of the life of salvation. The Christian life is both a resting in God and a supreme effort.

Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away implies that people should never think, 'Maybe I am not chosen by God, and therefore maybe Jesus will reject me when I come to him'. Jesus promises to receive everyone who comes to him and trusts him for salvation. Yet, a few verses later (v.44) Jesus states the paradoxical and corresponding truth that once people come to Jesus, they will realise that behind their willing decision to come and believe lies the mysterious, invisible work of the Father who all along was drawing them to Christ. This is all because of his love for them: <<***Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you***>> (Jeremiah 31:2-3). Refer also to Romans Chapter 9 and Ephesians 1:3-6.

Not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. Again, as if for emphasis, Jesus reiterates what he has been saying all along: everything is by the will of God. It is the Father who calls his creation to have life in him through his Son. This is the free gift of grace, yet it is God's desire that all should accept it: <<***This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires***>>

everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth>> (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:39

This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing. Jesus reveals that the Father has always wanted all people to come into a loving relationship with himself through his Son: <<*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls*>> (Joel 2:32).

All that he has given me implies that everyone who has been chosen by the Father and has been given by the Father to the Son for salvation will in fact be saved. In v.40 Jesus further explains that these people whom the Father has given him are also those who believe in the Son and have 'eternal life'. He has told the crowd what the Father has given to them; now he reveals that the Father gives true disciples to the Son in this same gracious act.

Raise it up on the last day. Once a person has come to faith in Jesus then nothing in this world or the next can break the bond they have with God; a true believer will never lose their salvation, as Paul confirms: <<*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'* No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord>> (Romans 8:35-39).

⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'

John 6:40

All who see the Son and believe in him. Jesus implies that it is the will of my Father that no true believer will ever lose his or her salvation, since everyone who believes in the Son will also have eternal life and will continue as a believer until the final judgment, i.e. the last day, when Jesus will raise them up into the fullness of eternal life.

In this one statement the major themes of this section are brought together: the Father's will, human seeing and believing, and the gift of eternal life.

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'⁴² They were saying, 'Is not

this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, “I have come down from heaven”?’⁴³ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not complain among yourselves.

John 6:41-43

Whose father and mother we know. As with Nathaniel (1:46), their problem is with where Jesus is from. They know Joseph and Jesus’ mother, and they judge Jesus’ claims on the basis of what they think they already know. It seems they believe that a being who has come from heaven would not have earthly parents.

Do not complain among yourselves. The grumbling is reminiscent of the pattern of grumbling against God in the OT: <<*And Moses said, ‘When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him – what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord’*>> (Exodus 16:8), <<*How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me? I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me*>> (Numbers 14:27), and: <<*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work*>> (Psalm 95:8-9). Jesus calls on them not to repeat the pattern of their ancestors but instead to respond in faith. It is, in effect, a call to repent. But the only way they could stop grumbling would be to become receptive of his teaching about himself. This they are incapable of doing.

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

John 6:44

No one can come to me means ‘no one is able to come to me’, for Greek *dynamai* means ‘to be able’. This implies that no human being in the world, on his own, has the moral and spiritual ability to come to Christ unless drawn by the Father, that is, gives him the desire and inclination to come and the ability to place trust in Christ Jesus.

I will raise that person up on the last day. By repeating his promise to raise the believer at the last day Jesus is claiming to be the one who fulfils the promises of resurrection in the age to come. This future hope is combined in this discourse with a present fulfilment, for Jesus will shortly say that those who eat the bread of heaven will not die but will live forever (vv.50-51).

⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by God.” Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

John 6:45-46

And they shall all be taught by God is a quote from Isaiah 54:13, the prophet speaks of God’s future restoration of Jerusalem to intimacy with himself. By

applying this text to his own ministry, Jesus is claiming that the eschatological blessings of the last day are already being experienced in his ministry; God's promise to Jerusalem is being fulfilled now. Paul also points out that believers are taught by God: <<*Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:9). Those who know Jesus' real identity understand how this is so, for they realise that those hearing Jesus are themselves being taught by God! But the point Jesus makes is different. He is explaining the way the Father draws people. He does so by teaching, as the rest of the verse makes clear.

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Those who correctly interpret Scripture and accept the call of God on their lives will understand that it is through his Son that they must respond.

He has seen the Father, that is, seen him in a full and complete way (1:18), but some people did see partial revelations of God in the OT. To see God in Christ would be far better.

Jesus' shift from hearing God to seeing him is probably significant. Many people, both in the OT and in the church age have heard from God in various ways, if not directly through his voice. The essence of John's Gospel is that anyone who has seen Jesus has indeed seen God, for Jesus is God incarnate.

⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

John 6:47-51

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. Jesus now concludes this section of his teaching by returning to the story of God's provision of manna to the Israelites. He repeats his claim to be the bread of life and draws out the significance of the word life. This bread he speaks of is a food that keeps one from dying, in contrast to the manna eaten by the wilderness generation, who nevertheless died. Obviously, any food keeps one from dying for a period of time; it sustains life. Jesus, however, is talking about food that is much more powerful than regular food, so that one may eat of it and not die, for whoever eats of this bread will live for ever. It is God's own life that is shared through this bread.

I am the living bread. The 'bread' Jesus gives is his flesh, a reference to Jesus' death on the Cross. Jesus' statement intermingles physical and spiritual truth. Jesus is not talking about literal 'bread', but he is the true living bread in the sense that those who believe in him have their spiritual hunger satisfied. He becomes this spiritually satisfying 'bread' by sacrificing his own physical body in his death on the Cross, and in that sense he can say that this spiritual bread is my flesh: <<*And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*>> (Hebrews 10:10).

This crowd has now received the interpretation of the sign as they had requested (v.30). Earlier the Jews had asked for a sign to legitimise Jesus' action in the temple, and he had spoken of the temple of his body and of his death and resurrection (2:18-21). Now this crowd has received teaching about the manna of his flesh and about how the divine gift of eternal life will be given through the Messiah's death. Here is a cryptic saying indeed! His reference to his flesh only heightens the scandal, as becomes clear in the next scene.

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

John 6:52

In this verse John refers to the Jews in their ethnic sense and is not referring to people who simply oppose Jesus. These are a crowd of people who were drawn to Jesus but were unable to comprehend his teaching and truly commit to what it means to be his disciple.

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? This is another example of misunderstanding in which Jesus' hearers take him literally. Jesus teaches spiritual truths by referring to physical objects, and people frequently misunderstand.

This Jewish crowd would have found Jesus' teaching, if it were literal, to be abhorrent. Cannibalism was found to be one of the worst crimes, even when it sustained life in some of the historic sieges of the past: <<Look, O Lord, and consider! To whom have you done this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have borne? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?>> (Lamentations 2:20), and: <<Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents; I will execute judgements on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind>> (Ezekiel 5:10). Drinking the blood of an animal was forbidden in the law: <<For the life of every creature – its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off>> (Leviticus 17:14); how much more so if it were the blood of a fellow human, created in the image of God?

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'

⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

John 6:53-59

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood cannot be intended literally, for no one ever did that. As Jesus has done frequently in this Gospel, he is speaking in terms of physical items in this world to teach about spiritual realities. Here, to 'eat' Jesus' flesh has the spiritual meaning of trusting or believing in him, especially in his death for the sins of mankind, thus he says for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. See also v.35, where Jesus speaks of coming to him as satisfying 'hunger' and believing in him as satisfying 'thirst'.

Similarly, to drink his blood means to trust in his atoning death, which is represented by the shedding of his blood. Although Jesus is not speaking specifically about the Lord's Supper here, there is a parallel theme, because the receiving of eternal life through being united with the Son of Man is represented in the Lord's Supper, where Jesus' followers symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood, as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. This is anticipated in OT feasts: <<*Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed*>> (1 Corinthians 5:7), and consummated in the marriage supper of the Lamb: <<*And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'* And he said to me, 'These are true words of God'>> (Revelation 19:9).

Jesus is not making the scandal any easier for the crowd by reiterating that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. However, the life he is offering is not something that is optional or that one can choose to ignore. This is an offer of eternal life or eternal separation from God; something that will be so painful to contemplate that Jesus needs to be almost brutal in his teaching.

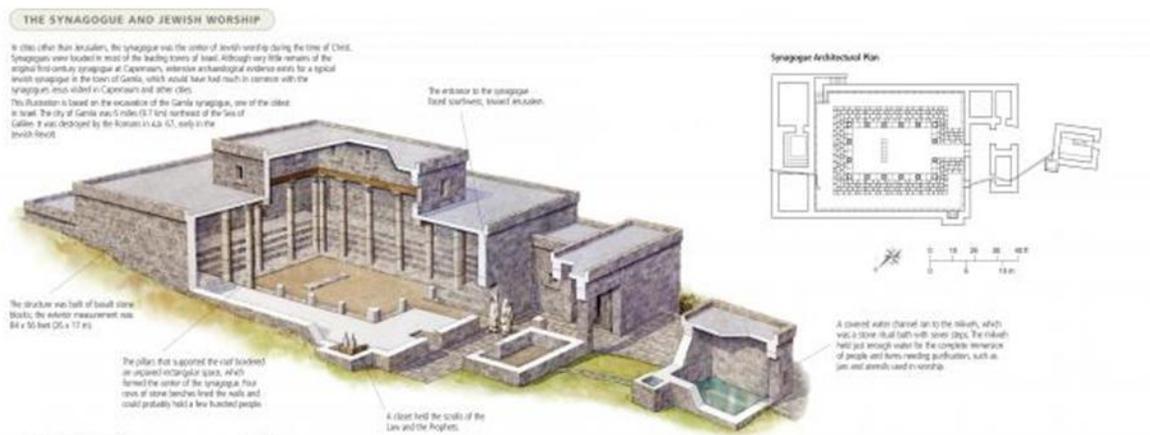
Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. The eating and the drinking has to do with shared life, mutual indwelling. In the physical realm one of the most powerful examples of shared life is eating and drinking: the laying down of life by a plant or animal and the interpenetration of life as molecules are transferred, thereby nourishing life. So once again Jesus' mystifying words are referring to something that could not be understood until after his death, resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Spirit. His death will be the ultimate laying down of life; his resurrection, ascension and sending the Spirit bring onto the human scene the new possibility of actually sharing in the life of God, just as he, the incarnate one, has shared in the lives of those who have believed in him.

Jesus will explain this more fully to his disciples during his last evening with them before his crucifixion: <<*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*>> (John 15:4-7).

Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. There is an ordering in this relationship, a clear hierarchy, for the Father is the source of all. The life of everyone is entirely dependent on Jesus, as is his on the Father. His Father was frequently referred to as the living God in the OT to distinguish him from all the deities that were in the imaginations of people, such as: <<*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?*>> (Psalm 42:2), and was recognised as such even by the pagan Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar: <<*When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, ‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?’>> (Daniel 6:20).*

Obviously, this teaching is especially unclear to these people. They do not understand Jesus’ identity, nor do they catch the allusion to his death, let alone the way the Lord will provide for his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This cryptic, scandalous teaching took place openly in the synagogue at Capernaum, which is the place where the Torah is expounded. In the Capernaum synagogue on this particular day the eternal Word himself was giving the manna of a greater revelation.

In cities other than Jerusalem, the synagogue was the centre of Jewish worship during the time of Christ. Synagogues were located in most of the leading towns of Israel. Although very little remains of some of the 1st Century synagogues, extensive archaeological evidence exists for a typical Jewish synagogue in the town of Gamla, which would have had much in common with the synagogues Jesus visited here and in other towns.



A typical Jewish Synagogue

This illustration is based on the excavation of the Gamla synagogue, one of the oldest in Israel. The city of Gamla was 6 miles or 9.7km northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It was destroyed by the Romans in AD67, early in the Jewish Revolt.

From Galilee and Judæa, 1st Century synagogues have been unearthed at Gamla, Masada, Herodium and Capernaum. Excavations at Capernaum have revealed residential structures, a synagogue and an octagonal Christian site. Based on thousands of coins found below its pavement, Capernaum’s prominent, well-preserved synagogue has been dated to the 4th or 5th Century

AD, although some argue it is earlier. However, beneath this were found walls of a previous structure, which is very likely the synagogue of Jesus' day that was the scene for the events here.

The synagogues typically consisted of large rooms, including some basilicas, built with the intent of serving as synagogues, with bench seating along the wall. Often the Torah ark, which is the storage place of the OT scrolls, is found within the synagogue and there is evidence for some synagogues, e.g. Chorazin, of a special decorative seat called the Seat of Moses. Moses' seat is traditionally understood as referring symbolically to the authority of Moses. However, recent archaeological evidence has revealed a literal chair found in early synagogues. Whether literal or figurative, it refers to a place from which experts on the law taught.

Literary evidence indicates that Sabbath services at a synagogue involved singing, set prayer readings and the reading of Scripture. In Palestine, this probably involved regular annual Sabbath reading cycles in Hebrew, with Aramaic translations or interpretation, as confirmed in Mishnah, Megillah 4:1-5, and v.10. There would also have been an interpretative homily on the weekly Scripture reading and a priestly blessing.

The leadership of the synagogue fell to the elders of the congregation and to officials such as the ruler of the synagogue, as Jairus in Mark 5:22. Also evidenced, was the practice of 'putting out of the synagogue' those who were at variance with accepted belief and practice, as seen in the story of Jesus healing a man who was born blind: <<*His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue*>> (John 9:22).

II.c.v John 6:60-71 - The Words of Eternal Life

Having recounted the controversy among the Jews over Jesus' claim to be the bread of life (v.52), John now says this controversy divided Jesus' own followers as well. Jesus responds to the people by confronting them with the implications of their reaction, and then he presses the Twelve for their response. He certainly does not change his message or try to make it more user-friendly. In Jesus' statements and in Peter's confession more is learned about Jesus and what it takes to truly be his disciple.

These verses are in two parts, vv.60-65 and vv.66-71. Each part begins with the response of many of his disciples, which is then followed by a statement regarding Jesus' identity and his teaching made first by Jesus himself and then by Peter. Each part includes a statement by Jesus about his betrayer.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' ⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you?' ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But

among you there are some who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, ‘For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.’

John 6:60-65

This teaching is difficult; who can accept it? Their questions seem to try to deflect responsibility away from themselves to accept the teaching of Jesus simply by faith. What is the relationship between being in the church and being, in fact, a Christian? This question has exercised the church from the beginning, as it did Judaism before. The issue arose in Jesus’ own ministry, for these people who have difficulty with Jesus’ teaching and who end up turning away from him are called his disciples. They were disciples in the sense of having come to Jesus and heard his teaching. But this level of discipleship would not count for much in the end. The soil in their hearts was not such that Jesus’ seed could take root and produce fruit. Refer to Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9 and Luke 8:4-8.

Does this offend you? The light shines into the darkness. Their offense is the opposite of faith, and Jesus makes sure they realise what they are saying. This question searches the soul of each believer. Does one find any of Jesus’ teachings offensive? What causes a believer to falter? There is much in Jesus’ teaching to scandalise everyone. But those who are born from above, those who have faith, who are prepared to trust in Jesus even when his teachings or his ways are puzzling.

Jesus had caused offence in his home town before by his remarkable teaching about the Kingdom of God: <<Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?>> And they took offence at him>> (Mark 6:3). So it is not surprising that he should offend this crowd with such dramatic teaching about the need to fully consume him!

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? Some of those present would indeed witness Jesus’ ascension back into heaven: <<So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God>> (Mark 16:19), <<While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven>> (Luke 24:51), and: <<When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight>> (Acts 1:9).

It is the spirit that gives life. Paul confirms this in a letter to Corinth: <<Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life>> (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). Jesus continues his diagnosis of the problem by returning to the twin themes developed earlier in the chapter, the themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He interweaves these themes by speaking first of the need for the Spirit; then of the need for faith, i.e. there are some who do not believe; and then of the Father’s decisive action, no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father. The need for the Spirit was

already developed in the conversation with Nicodemus (3:3-8). By identifying the Spirit as the one that gives life, he provides the foundation for what was said earlier about the necessity of being <<*born of the Spirit*>> (3:8b). The Holy Spirit works powerfully in and through the words that Jesus speaks, and those words are spirit and life in the sense that they work in the unseen spiritual realm and awaken genuine spiritual life. The Spirit's role in bringing life both physically and spiritually was known in the OT, for example: <<*If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust*>> (Job 34:14-15), and: <<*When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground*>> (Psalm 104:29-30), as well as Ezekiel Chapter 37; but here it is also revealed that Jesus too has that role.

The flesh, i.e. human nature including emotions, will and intellect, is completely incapable of producing genuine spiritual life, i.e. is useless, for this can only be done by the Spirit; refer to Romans 7:14-25.

For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe. Jesus' divine omniscience is shown by the fact that he knew the status of everyone's heart and therefore he knew who those were who did not believe. He also knew the future because he knew who it was who would betray him, Judas Iscariot. Only God could know these things.

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

John 6:66

Many of these early followers were not genuine disciples of Christ, for they turned back. Their initial faith was not genuine and they were perhaps following Jesus only because of the physical benefits he gave, such as healing and multiplying food. They liked what they saw but did not want the commitment that was required to be genuine believers.

It should be remembered that Jesus had at least seventy disciples in addition to the Twelve whom he sent out in pairs: <<*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go*>> (Luke 10:1).

⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?'

John 6:67

This is the first reference to the Twelve in this Gospel which refers to the original inner core of disciples who would be nominated as apostles. Their existence and appointment are assumed from the Synoptics: Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-18, and Luke 6:12-16.

Do you also wish to go away? This question is posed to test the heart of true believers and shows that they do have the choice whether to follow Jesus or not.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.

John 6:68

Simon Peter answered him. Although there was no hierarchy in the apostolic group, it is frequently Peter who is the one who appears to be the spokesman for the others. Sometimes this brings him praise: <<*And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven’*>> (Matthew 16:17), and sometimes rebuke: <<*But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things’*>> (Mark 8:33).

To whom can we go rightly implies that there is no other teacher who can lead people to eternal life and to true fellowship with God himself. The others following Jesus had been offended by his words, but the Twelve accept Jesus’ claim that his words are spirit and life (v.63). They do not claim to have understood what Jesus’ has been saying. In fact, they will not be able to understand until after the crucifixion has taken place and the Spirit has guided them into all truth regarding Jesus and all that he has done and taught. But they do recognise that Jesus is speaking from God.

⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’ ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.’ ⁷¹ He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

John 6:69-71

We have come to believe implies that Jesus’ disciples at this point had genuine, saving faith, although they would still have to learn much more about Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the meaning of these things for them. The verbs translated believe and know are in the perfect tense, which often suggests a state that began in the past and continues to the present. This nuance fits this context, since Peter stands in contrast to those who, although attracted to Jesus by the feeding miracle, were immediately scandalised. The Twelve came to faith in Jesus some time ago and have hung in with him since then, including through this most recent challenge to their faith by his strange teaching.

Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Holy One of God anticipates later references to Jesus being consecrated, or set apart for service to God: <<*If those to whom the word of God came were called “gods” – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”?*>> (John 10:35-36), <<*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth*>> (John 17:19). In the OT, God was called ‘the Holy One of Israel’ <<*I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel*>> (Psalm 71:22), and: <<*For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you*>> (Isaiah 43:3).

There are similar confessions of Jesus as the Christ by Peter in the Synoptics: <<Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'>> (Matthew 16:16), <<He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah'>> (Mark 8:29), and: <<He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'The Messiah of God'>> (Luke 9:20).

Did I not choose you, the twelve? The disciples might have expected some comment of thanks to acknowledge Peter's confession but Jesus reply is to reaffirm that he has chosen them and not the other way round.

Yet one of you is a devil. The presence of Judas among the Twelve reveals that no group is entirely pure, just as Nicodemus' presence among the Pharisees indicates that no group is entirely alienated from God. John's dualistic language is very stark, but he realises the ambiguities of life. John will go on to reveal that Judas would betray Jesus to his death, thus acting in accordance with Satan's wishes, who was <<*a murderer from the beginning*>> (John 8:44b).

Even Jesus' choice for someone to be a member of his inner circle of disciples is not going to save that person unless one has faith. Judas had the most intimate access to Jesus; he had one of the best seats in the house for seeing God revealed in the flesh. But he lacked humble trust and love for Jesus for who Jesus actually is. This thought is very sobering in light of much false optimism among Christians today.