



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 6:1-14 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(John 6:1) After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).

After Jesus affirmed that His Father and He worked on the Sabbath and He was the Son of God and did what He saw the Father doing, Jesus left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee where He could quietly continue to teach His disciples and give them rest. Furthermore, in John 5:20, Jesus had told the Jews and His disciples, “The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.” In John 6:1-14, Jesus would soon do a “greater work” than He had done before, a work that would astonish everyone involved. The Sea of Galilee was also named the Sea of Tiberias (named after the second emperor of the Roman Empire, Tiberius). The “other side” was probably the East side of the Sea of Galilee near the wilderness area where John the Baptist had preached.

(John 6:2) A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

Large crowds continued to follow Jesus because He healed the sick. He healed so many with various diseases that no one could reasonably doubt that He had the power to heal people. Jesus' healings also served as signs that showed He is the Son of God and was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. The religious leaders acknowledged that Jesus healed people, but they opposed Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath.

(John 6:3) Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.

Jesus prayed and sometimes taught sitting on the side of a mountain, as He did when He preached His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5-7). His voice would more easily carry to a large crowd when He spoke on a mountain side. At first, Jesus sat down with His disciples to teach them privately, but the crowds eventually found Him. Jesus taught His disciples privately and explained to them in Matthew 13:11, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Jesus taught His disciples the secrets of His parables that He wanted them to reveal when they preached and wrote the gospels. Later, in John 14:26, Jesus assured them (and us as readers of the Bible), "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

(John 6:4) Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.

With the Passover being near, Jesus would soon return to Jerusalem; therefore, His disciples needed to spend as much private time as possible with Jesus to learn Jesus' teachings thoroughly before His arrest and crucifixion. They had no idea that their time with Jesus on earth would soon come to, from their initial perspective, a tragic end.

(John 6:5) Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, *said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"

John does not tell us how much private teaching time Jesus had with His disciples, for crowds followed Him and pressed upon Him wherever He

went (even seeking to touch Him as He walked on the road that they might be healed). When Jesus looked up from His teaching, He saw a large crowd coming up the mountain toward Him. Only those with a sincere interest in seeking Jesus would have made the effort to climb the mountain or help a sick loved one up the mountain for healing. Jesus acted from compassion and thought of the hungry crowd coming toward Him rather than thinking they were a disturbance during His teaching. Instead, Jesus took the interruption as an opportunity to test His disciples and teach them more about himself. Philip was from nearby Bethsaida, so he might conceivably have known where much bread could be bought. Philip was also the one who had asked Nathanael, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). He would soon learn more about the good Jesus could do.

(John 6:6) This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.

Jesus tested Philip to show Philip how little Philip really knew about Him or had learned about Him from their time together. The fact that out of all twelve disciples, Jesus chose to test Philip can also be explained by how slowly Philip seemed to grasp who Jesus was (and is) from what Jesus said and the signs that Philip saw Jesus doing. In John 14:9, Jesus said to Philip, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” What Jesus taught about the Father and himself in John chapter 5 explained what Jesus meant by the words, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” But unlike Philip, we have the entire New Testament to help us understand John chapter 5 and subsequent chapters in John’s Gospel. However, between John 5 and John 14, Jesus taught so much and did such astonishing signs that no wonder Jesus could ask Philip, “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”

(John 6:7) Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”

Though being from Bethsaida, Philip knew of nowhere nearby that would have enough bread for sale to feed such a large crowd. Furthermore, if such a bakery had existed nearby, it would have taken far more money than they

had to buy all the bread the crowd would need. As a matter of fact, six months wages would only buy enough bread for each person to barely “get a little.” From Philip’s observations, Philip believed that what Jesus wanted to do was humanly impossible, but Philip would soon learn the meaning of Jesus’ words to His disciples from Matthew 19:26, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” As the Son of God, as another sign, and to fulfill biblical expectations and prophecies about the Messiah, Jesus would soon do the impossible and feed everyone in a large crowd (not to meet His personal needs as the devil tempted Jesus to do).

(John 6:8) One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, *said to Him,

Andrew and Peter were also from Bethsaida, and likewise, Andrew did not know of any nearby bakeries. He knew only a miracle could meet the needs of a hungry crowd. As we have seen so far in John’s gospel, the disciples were accustomed to buying food to eat, even if they had to go into a Samaritan village and buy food the Jews considered unclean. They did not expect or ask Jesus to work a miracle to feed a crowd, and they did not have any food of their own to share. Only one person could be found who had any food at all; and if it were for sale, they could buy what he had.

(John 6:9) “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?”

Some have speculated that seeing the crowd an enterprising boy (or his family) sent him out to sell food to a hungry crowd. The Bible does not tell us how the boy found Andrew or how Andrew found the boy and learned he had food. Barley loaves were not as good as wheat bread and were more commonly eaten by poor people. Andrew knew that five barley loaves and two fish would scarcely be enough to feed Jesus and His disciples, and it would certainly not be enough to feed a large crowd. Nevertheless, Andrew told Jesus what was available to eat and where he had found it.

(John 6:10) Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

From Matthew 14:21, we learn the additional detail that “those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” In Mark 6:39-40, we learn the detail that Jesus ordered His disciples “to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.” Jesus arranged the people in a way that would promote fellowship among them, just as they would find fellowship at a feast in the kingdom of God. Also, by having everyone sit down, they could all see what Jesus planned to do to the glory of God when meeting their needs and giving them another sign to believe and believe in Him.

(John 6:11) Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.

As we learned in John chapter 5 and previous chapters, the Father and the Son always acted together in perfect agreement, and the Son did what He saw His Father doing. As was His custom and a tradition of the Jews, Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks to His Father for God’s provision. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:11, He prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The disciples were accustomed to having enough bread only one day at a time and needing to have enough money one day at a time to buy enough bread. In this situation, Jesus showed the crowd and His disciples that He could answer the Lord’s Prayer because He is the Son of God. Then, Jesus himself distributed the bread and fish to the crowd. Each person in the crowd could see Jesus giving the crowd bread and fish. Jesus could see and speak to each person individually. He could see and heal any in the crowd who were sick. He could make certain that each person ate as much as they wanted. As He gave them food, Jesus kept reaching into the basket and bringing out bread and fish—an unending supply. At the same time, we can imagine hungry people thinking, “Will He have enough for me?” From His basket, Jesus had more than enough for each person in a crowd of about 5,000 to eat as much as they wanted until they were satisfied. After climbing a mountain to see Jesus, we can only imagine how much they must have eaten at that feast to have also been fully satisfied after they ate. The details regarding the miracle of Jesus feeding more than 5000 people indicate that Jesus

worked a true miracle of multiplying the five loaves of bread and two fish. Notice: in John chapter 2, Jesus changed water into wine instantaneously, which only God can do; then, in John chapter 5, Jesus instantaneously multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands, which only God can do. Throughout His gospel, John shows us that by the signs, healings, and miracles Jesus worked, Jesus was (and is) the Person He said He was (and is). As the Word of God, all things created were created through Jesus before He came into the world in human flesh. Out of His compassionate heart, out of the loving heart of God, Jesus could easily multiply bread and fishes to feed a large crowd; so, He did so on this occasion, but not always. Jesus did not want people coming to Him just for Him to feed them physically. He knew their moral and spiritual needs, and their need to become children of God and receive eternal life, were far more important. [Note: This verse does not mean that Jesus' disciples did not help Jesus feed the 5,000; rather, John emphasized the most important truth—Jesus was personally involved in miraculously feeding the people.]

(John 6:12) When they were filled, He *said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.”

Just as Jesus worked to serve others, He demonstrated how to serve and taught His disciples how to work to serve others too. First, Jesus showed His disciples how to feed people with grace and kindness a never-ending and continually multiplying supply of bread and fish. Though they could not multiply food as He did, they could serve others with grace and kindness, and they could help people meet their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. Second, Jesus told them to gather up the leftovers, which they would do in a respectful manner like Jesus showed them. From their experience, the disciples and the people learned that Jesus could satisfy people fully, whether materially (by feeding them), physically (by healing them), or spiritually (by saving them from sin and transforming them). Everything our compassionate Father wanted done regarding life or death among His people, Jesus could do and did. Only after the people had eaten their fill did Jesus tell His disciples to gather the leftover fragments rather than leave them lying in the grass. Jesus taught His disciples to use God's gifts wisely so nothing God gives us is wasted. The followers of Jesus

should not waste anything that the Father has abundantly provided for our benefit as well as the benefit of others. Furthermore, God will bless those who give thanks and share God's gifts as Jesus did.

(John 6:13) So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

In Jesus' day, every Jew carried a small basket of food wherever they went, particularly to avoid eating unclean food when they traveled (for most Jews, they particularly wanted to avoid eating Samaritan food when passing through Samaria!). In the disciples' case, their food baskets were empty, for they had no food for Jesus to share with the crowd. But after they gathered the food that the crowd had not eaten, all twelve of them filled their baskets full. Jesus did not want them to expect that He would work miracles every day to feed them. They would need to do the Father's work just as He did. His disciples needed to collect the food so they would have food to eat that day and the next day or until they could afford to buy bread again. Jesus had good reasons for all He told His disciples to do.

(John 6:14) Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

The Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well first thought He was a prophet, because He could tell her about her past. Then, Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah. After her neighbors met Jesus, they came to know that Jesus is truly the Savior of the world. Those Jesus fed thought of Him as "the prophet." Among their Messianic expectations, the people expected God to fulfill Deuteronomy 18:15, which reads, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet." In answer to the prayers of the prophet Moses, in the wilderness the LORD fed the people manna, a bread from heaven, as much as they could eat. In answer to Jesus' prayer, on the side of a mountain the LORD fed more than 5000 people using only five loaves of bread and two fish. Later, in John 6:58, speaking about himself as bread, Jesus said, "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 forever.” Jesus acted as the one they expected to come as the Messiah, so they immediately wanted to make Him a political king by force, rather than wait for Jesus to fully become their Savior and the Savior of the world by His sacrificial death and resurrection (see John 6:15).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Jesus took His disciples up a mountain instead of into a town for rest and relaxation?
2. Why did a great crowd follow Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus test Philip? What benefit do Christians derive from Jesus testing them?
4. Why do you think Jesus distributed the food to the seated crowd?
5. Why do you think Jesus told His disciples to gather up the fragments of bread after the people had eaten their fill?

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