



LESSON 12

Jesus feeds the 5,000

JOHN 6:1-15



Jesus is the Messiah whom Moses spoke about.



“When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’” (John 6:14).

Supporting Truths

1. Jesus has power to create food.
2. Jesus is the Prophet whom Moses foretold.
3. Jesus is God and not just a prophet.
4. Honor Jesus as Messiah and God.
5. Desire Jesus more than food.

Objectives

1. List how many fish, loaves, men, and leftover baskets there were.
2. Explain why the people said that Jesus was the promised prophet (Deut 18:15, 18).
3. Compare Jesus' miracle to God feeding Israel in the wilderness (Exod 16; Num 11).
4. Decide if the crowd accepted His authority or not.
5. Explain what it means that Jesus is Himself “the bread of life.”

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Summary

The crowds had seen Jesus perform many miracles, so they followed Him to a remote place. They wanted physical healing, but they did not honor Jesus as the Son of God. So Jesus performed a miracle to challenge them. By feeding the 5,000, Jesus brought to mind Moses' prophecy concerning Him. He also showed that He had in Himself the power of God. However, the people still only wanted what He could provide, so Jesus withdrew from their presence.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Those that seek only God's provision, forsaking the Person, prove they do not really love Jesus. They actually love themselves; Jesus is just a way to get what they want. These people will not find Jesus, for the gospel is really about being restored to a right relationship with God through His Son. That means wanting Jesus Himself, trusting and honoring and obeying and delighting in Him for who He is—the promised Messiah and the true God.



Jesus has power over disease and death
Mark 5:21-43

Jesus feeds the 5,000
John 6:1-15

Jesus walks on water
Matthew 14:23-33

JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Lesson Commentary

Jesus is the Messiah whom Moses spoke about.

Jesus displayed great power and love in His many miracles. No one denied His power, and multitudes flocked to Him for healing of all kinds. However, most did not accept His claims of equality with God the Father. Instead of honoring Him (John 5:23), they opposed Him, because He violated their traditions (5:16). They said their traditions were from Moses, but Jesus said He was the one Moses had written about (5:46). The Jews had trouble believing this: had Moses really written about Jesus? To help the people believe this, Jesus planned a miracle that would remind them of Moses.

By feeding the 5,000, Jesus showed that He was the One whom Moses had spoken about so many years before: He was “the Prophet,” the Messiah sent by God to lead His people (Deut 18:15).

THINK ABOUT IT
The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels (Matt 14:13–23; Mark 6:30–46; Luke 9:10–17).

Jesus saw a fickle crowd on a formative day (6:1–4)

Crowds followed Jesus, but only because of His miraculous healings (John 6:2) and the food He provided (6:26). They did not really want Jesus. They did not come to Him on His terms, nor did they bow in fear or embrace Him in love. They did not believe He deserved their worship as God, as the true Messiah and God’s Son. They treated Jesus like a genie in a bottle or a blank check. They did not want Him, only the things He could provide: food, healing from sickness, and freedom and protection from their enemies.

So Jesus planned a miracle to confront the crowd and prove that He was the Promised One. The setting was just right. They were on the east side of the Sea of Galilee on the Golan Heights (6:1–3), in an out of the way place where food was scarce (Mark 6:31). It was evening (6:35), the time to eat.

And there was a huge crowd, probably around 20,000 counting women and children (Matt 14:21). There was an incredible need for food.

But, more importantly, it was almost Passover (John 6:4). It was the time when God’s people remembered not only the Passover lamb, but also the events that followed: God’s deliverance from Egypt, manna from heaven, and Moses’ leadership. It was also the time when God’s people looked forward to future deliverance and prosperity under the leadership of a prophet like Moses. Every Passover they hoped that this would be the day when the Messiah would set them free from Roman rule.

Jesus challenged faithless disciples (6:5–9)

By performing this miracle at the time of Passover, Jesus connected His miracle to the miraculous feeding of Israel in the wilderness (John 6:5). Also, His question to Philip is like Moses’ question to God (Num 11:13). His testing of Philip is like God’s testing of Israel (Exod 16:4). And Andrew’s words about not having enough for so many call to mind Moses’ similar doubts (Num 11:21–22). These parallels show Jesus setting up a new miracle to match the old.

This sign was for the crowd, but it was also for the disciples, whose faith was still weak. Jesus may have asked Philip where to buy bread because he was from the nearest town, Bethsaida (John 1:44; Luke 9:10). But Jesus wasn’t

interested in Philip’s expertise. He was testing him (John 6:6). Jesus’ questions were designed to reveal the hopelessness of the situation. They

were meant to challenge the disciples’ feeble faith. With no possibility of satisfying the people’s hunger on their own, the disciples would have to look to Jesus to provide. Yet Philip could not take his eyes off the problem: not even 8 months’ wages would be enough for everyone to have even a little (6:7).

THINK ABOUT IT
Jesus questioned the disciples to cause them to realize how impossible it was for them to feed so many with so little.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Instead of trusting in the Son of God standing right in front of him, Philip doubted as he gazed at all the people standing around him. The others doubted too, including Andrew (6:9).

Jesus provided a fulfilling sign (6:10-13)

The miracle itself was fulfilling in two ways. First, it was a filling dinner—everyone ate not just a little bit, but until they were very full (6:11)! But second, and more importantly, this sign shows that Jesus is the One who fulfills the prophecy of a coming Messiah. The Old Testament expected the Messiah to be like a second Moses, and Moses himself said God would raise up “a prophet like me” (Deut 18:15). The Messiah would lead Israel out of bondage once again (Hos 11:1, 11); He would be a shepherd who would feed His people (Ezek 34:29).

Jesus arranged this miracle to show that He was this second Moses. He performed a feeding miracle at the time of Passover to remind people of the feeding miracle in the wilderness (Exod 16:15). He provided more than enough food to remind them of how more than enough food was provided in the wilderness (John 6:13; Ps 78:24-25). So Jesus was reminding them of Moses, but Jesus was also showing that He was even greater than Moses. Moses did not actually provide the manna; he only said what God would do. But Jesus made the food Himself. Jesus was challenging the crowd to look past the food. He was challenging their shallow, selfish hopes of a Messiah who would meet only their physical, social, and political needs. He was proving that He was God, worthy of the same honor as the Father (5:23) and just as able to meet their spiritual needs as the Father.

Jesus rejected a false coronation (6:14-15)

But the crowd didn't get the message. They rightly concluded that Jesus was *the Prophet* Moses spoke about (6:14), as Peter later confirmed (Acts 3:22-23). Jesus

was *the Messiah* who will bring times of refreshing, when no one will hunger again (3:20). But even though they were willing to accept Him as Messiah, they were not willing to accept Him as God. They wanted to control Him, to make Him a king who would satisfy their earthly needs (John 6:15). They saw only a human king, not the King of Kings who also became human. They felt only their physical needs, not their deep spiritual need. So Jesus went away from them, just as God took His blessing away from Israel when they settled for manna and quail but rejected God Himself (Num 11:20, 33).

The next day Jesus explained to the crowd that He was what they really needed, not bread. Those who ate the bread and fish He created would continue to experience physical hunger, but all those who received *“the bread of life,” Jesus Himself*, would permanently satisfy their spiritual hunger (John 6:35; Matt 5:6). Like a person eating bread, they needed to hunger for Him (John 6:27), personally come to Him (6:35), receive Him into their lives (6:56), and trust Him to provide life (6:47). What about you? Do you hunger and thirst for Jesus? Or, like the curious crowds, are you interested only in the good things Jesus can provide? If so, be warned: whoever does not love and worship Jesus Himself will not find Him.

THINK ABOUT IT
Jesus withdraws from people who come to Him only to satisfy their selfish desires.



So come to Jesus as to God Himself, hungering for Him as one a starving for food. Come to Him on His terms, in true sorrow over sin (Matt 5:4), repentance (4:17), submission to Him as sovereign Lord (Rom 10:9), and faithful obedience (John 14:15). If you do, He promises you eternal life (6:54). And eternal life is far greater than any food, for *eternal life* is *to be spiritually alive and responsive to God, to truly know Jesus* (17:3).

Lesson Outline

Jesus is the Messiah whom Moses spoke about.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Come to Jesus, not to the things Jesus gives (6:1–3).
2. Come to Jesus, even when things look bad (6:4–9).
3. Come to Jesus, for He powerfully provides (6:10–13).
4. Come to Jesus with honor and obedience (6:14–15).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Jesus saw a fickle crowd on a formative day (6:1–4).
 - The crowd did not really want Jesus or His message (6:1–2).
 - Passover reminded Israel of the Exodus, manna, and Moses (6:3–4).
2. Jesus challenged faithless disciples (6:5–9).
 - Jesus decided to teach the crowd a Passover lesson (6:5a).
 - Jesus decided to test His doubting disciples (6:5b–9).
3. Jesus provided a fulfilling sign (6:10–13).
 - Jesus' miraculous food reminded of Moses (6:10–13).
 - Jesus' miraculous food proved He was greater than Moses (6:10–13).
4. Jesus rejected a false coronation (6:14–15).
 - The crowd was right that He was the Prophet to come (6:14).
 - The crowd was wrong in the kind of king they wanted (6:15).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3-5 Lesson Questions

1. **What did the people want Jesus to do for them?**
Heal them with miracles.
2. **How many loaves, fish, and people were there?**
5 loaves, 2 fish, and around 20,000 people.
3. **After everyone was full, how many baskets of food were left over?**
Twelve baskets.
4. **What did the people try to do to Jesus?**
They tried to make Him a king who would give them what they wanted.



Ages 6-11 Lesson Questions

1. **When did this miracle happen?**
Just before Passover, showing that this miracle was like God feeding Israel with manna.
2. **Why did Jesus make this miracle like the miracle of the manna?**
To show that Moses testified about Him; that He was God and deserved the people's honor.
3. **Why did Jesus ask Philip about buying bread?**
To test if the disciples believed who He really was.
4. **How was Jesus like Moses?**
He provided more than enough food for the crowd.
5. **How was Jesus greater than Moses?**
He Himself created food to feed the crowd.
6. **Who did the people decide Jesus was?**
The Prophet Moses said would come; the Messiah who would feed and deliver.
7. **Why did Jesus go away from them?**
Because they only wanted to use Him to get what they wanted.
8. **What did Jesus later call Himself? Why?**
He called Himself the "bread of life" to show that we need to receive and trust Jesus Himself.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5

A
B
C



INTRODUCE



ILLUSTRATE



APPLY

A SEA OF FACES

Illustrate just how many people were sitting on the grass before Jesus. Since there were 5,000 men, there may have been about 20,000 people total, counting women and children. Lay a large piece of butcher paper across the floor. Give the children markers and ask them to draw 10 circles for faces. Then 50. Then 100. Talk about how much greater 20,000 is than 100. Use this illustration to demonstrate the incredible miracle Jesus performed that day.

THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE!

Help the children realize how impossible it is to do what Jesus did. Select a volunteer and give him a single, small, cookie. Ask him to share the cookie with the whole class. Midway through his attempt, ask those who have already received a piece if they have had enough or whether they want more. Instruct the child to go back and give them some more. It will soon become apparent that one cookie cannot feed even a small class. In today's lesson, Jesus did much more than feed a few children.

BARLEY LOAVES AND FISH

Bring in some barley rolls or crackers, and either dried or pickled fish. Explain that the "barley loaves" were not loaves of bread like we think of. They were small rolls or even just crackers. The boy had brought five for his meal. The fish were probably small like sardines, either dried or pickled to preserve them. Allow the children to see, touch, smell, and maybe even taste the barley rolls and fish.

THE GIFT OR THE GIVER?

Show a wrapped gift to the class. Talk about different times we receive gifts (birthdays, Christmas, etc.). Tell the children that it's good to say "thank you" when we receive a gift. Ask the children, "Who do we say thank you to when we receive a gift, the gift or the giver?" The giver, of course! The gift demonstrates the love and grace of the giver. However, explain that the people in today's story wanted only the gift (bread and fish), not the giver (Jesus Himself). They did not express their thanks to Jesus by loving and obeying Him.

LOAVES AND FISH

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheets, cardstock, glue, scissors, and crayons.

Directions: Have children color and cut out the pieces of bread and fish. Glue all pieces and the verse to a sheet of cardstock.

Loaves and Fish

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6-8



INTRODUCE



ILLUSTRATE



APPLY

WOW!

Ask the children if they have ever seen anything that amazed them. Have they ever been to a circus or watched the Olympics? What we are going to hear about today is even more amazing: Jesus feeding thousands of people from one small meal. In today's lesson we will again see that Jesus, without a doubt, is God. He will perform a miracle that is truly amazing.

IMPOSSIBLE SCENARIO

Present a child with a fun, yet impossible, task. For instance, you might challenge a child to eat 6 saltine crackers in 60 seconds without anything to drink. After they fail, ask the class to come up with some suggestions that might help. While they may come up with a few ideas, few will think of asking you for help. Explain that this was exactly how Jesus' disciples reacted when He asked them to supply food for more than 5,000 people. Explain that Jesus had the ability to solve the problem and meet the need by His power, but He asked the disciples what they would do in order to test their faith. Finally, try the activity again, but this time help the child eat the crackers.

FAITH LIKE A...VENDING MACHINE?

Ask the kids to describe a vending machine. With a vending machine, you only need to follow the right steps to get what you want: (1) put the right money in and (2) push the right buttons. Do we sometimes treat God like that? Do we pray, read the Bible, and go to church, all so that we can get what we want? If we do that, we don't really love God; we actually just love ourselves. We don't have a relationship with God; we just love what He can give us. It also shows that we don't really honor God, because we're trying to control Him. That's the problem Jesus is facing from the crowd in the story today.

SUGAR RUSH

When you eat a cookie, does it taste good? When you eat two cookies, does it still taste good? How about three? Four? Ten? Twenty-five? Eventually, you get sick of cookies (and probably just plain sick). Numbers 11:20 also illustrates this. We can never be satisfied if we just try to get the good things Jesus can give us. We need Him. We'll never be satisfied until Jesus is all we really want or need.

LOAVES AND FISH NECKLACE

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheet, yarn, scissors, and crayons.

Directions: Have students color and cut out the loaves, fish, and verse from the craft sheet. Punch a hole through all pieces. Weave yarn through the holes to create a necklace.

Loaves and Fish Necklace

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1



AGES 9-11



INTRODUCE



ILLUSTRATE



APPLY

GREATER THAN MOSES

See how many Old Testament prophets the class can identify (you might even split the class in two and make it into a game). Ask the children who their favorite prophet is and why. Can they remember anything the prophets did? Did any of the children think of Moses? Explain that today Jesus is going to show that Moses spoke about Him. Explain that Jesus is going to show He is much more than a prophet, even greater than Moses.

HOW MANY COULD YOU FEED?

Ask the children if their families ever host birthday parties or special holiday events. As the discussion unfolds, direct their attention to how many people came to one of those events and how much work it was to feed so many people. Stretch their imagination by asking how many people they think their parents could feed at one time. Begin with a realistic number and go higher and higher. End with five thousand, the number of men who Jesus fed with only five loaves of bread and two fish (don't forget to tell the children that there could have easily been 20,000 people present).

MULTIPLY

Two hundred denarii were not enough money to feed the crowd (John 6:7). A denarius was the average pay for a day's work. Help the children understand the immensity of the crowds by doing some multiplication. Ask the children how much it costs to get lunch (a fish sandwich) at a fast food restaurant. Multiply that by the number of children in the room. Then by the number of people in your church. Finally, by 20,000, an estimate of how many people were present when Jesus fed the multitude. The huge cost will give the children a little more insight into why the disciples were daunted by Jesus' telling them to feed the people.

"SAY UNCLE!"

Is an expression used in North America to demand that one's opponent give up. Saying "uncle" is equivalent to saying, "I give up." It indicates submission. Explain that Jesus asked His disciples about how to feed the crowds in order to cause them to admit that they couldn't feed the people with their own power or resources. He placed the disciples in an impossible situation in order to cause them to turn to Him for help.

MORE THAN JUST MARVEL—RESPOND

When the people saw Jesus' miracles, they were amazed, but they did not respond in faith that He is God. Jesus performed His miracles so that people would see His power and believe. Unfortunately, many people saw and were impressed but did not believe. This is much like the story of a man who was world renowned for his talent as a tightrope walker. He would perform around the world and dazzle people with his amazing feats of balance. On one such tightrope walk over Niagara Falls, the crowds were amazed by his skill. When he arrived to the crowd he asked them, "Who believes I can push a man in this wheelbarrow across the falls?" A man in the front of the crowd said "I do! I believe!" The tightrope walker then said, "Come and get in the wheelbarrow." The man would not get into the wheelbarrow. The man would not back up his faith with actions. Is that real faith? The people in today's lesson were amazed by Jesus' miracle but did not truly believe that He is God. How about you?