

The Parable of Feeding the Multitude

by Shari Freeland

The events of the Bible can be understood in several ways: they are recorded facts of history, prophecies of things to come, and physical and spiritual instruction. Our Savior was trying to point out to his disciples that the event of the feeding of the multitudes was more than just a miracle in time...

Matthew 16: 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up?

Mark 6: 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

The Setting

There are several allusions to the passages of the 23rd Psalm in the setting of the feeding of the multitudes. (NASB version cited for all scriptures)

1 יהוה is my shepherd,
I shall not want. 2 He makes me
lie down in green pastures;

.....

Matt 14:19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass ...

Mark 6:39 And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. 40 They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.

John 6:10 Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.' Now there was much grass in the place.

He leads me
beside quiet waters.

.....

Matt 14:14, Mark 5:34 When He went ashore He saw a large crowd,

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

3 He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of
righteousness for His name's sake.

.....

Mark 6: and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

Luke 9:11 ... and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.

4 Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me.

Mark 6: 35 When it was already quite late,
His disciples came to Him and said, "This
place is desolate and it is already quite late;

Luke 9:12 Now the day was ending, and the
twelve came and said to Him, 'Send the
crowd away, that they may go into the
surrounding villages and countryside and
find lodging and get something to eat; for
here we are in a desolate place.'

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Matt. 14:16, Mark 6:37 But He answered
them, "You give them something to eat!"

Luke 9:17 And they all ate and were
satisfied.

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.

To complete the psalm: "6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of
my life, and I will dwell in the house of יהוה forever."

The above references are for the first feeding of the multitude of 5000 men. The same setting,
people seated on the ground besides the water, is recorded for the feeding of the 4000 men in
Matthew 15 and Mark 8.

Word study:

Desolate place/Desert/Wilderness Place: (used 50 times in NT #2048)

Matthew 14:13, 15

Mark 6:

Luke 9:10, 12

John the Baptist preached there (Matthew 3:1, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:2, John 1:23)

Yeshua tempted there (Matthew 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1)

Matthew 24:26 'Behold he is in the desert, go not forth'

Yeshua grew up in the desert (Luke 1:80)

Yeshua retired there to pray (Mark 1:35, Mark 1:45, Luke 4:42, Luke 5:16)

Naked, homeless man possessed by legion driven to desert (Luke 8:29)

99 sheep left in the wilderness (Luke 15:4)

Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14)

Fathers ate manna in the wilderness (John 6:31, 49)

Woman flees to the wilderness and is fed 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6, 12:14)