

### The Feeding of the Four Thousand

#### Mark 8:1-9

Mark 8:1-9 – *“In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, <sup>2</sup> “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.” <sup>4</sup> Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” <sup>5</sup> He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” <sup>6</sup> So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. <sup>7</sup> They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. <sup>8</sup> So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. <sup>9</sup> Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away.”*

#### Background Notes

The miracle of ‘Feeding of the Four Thousand’ is not as well-known as the ‘Feeding of the Five Thousand.’ The feeding of 5000 is recorded in all four Gospels, whereas the feeding of 4000 is found only in Matthew and Mark.

Some skeptics of the Bible say that this is evidence of errors in the Bible -- the fact that some Gospels say 5000 and some say 4000. They assume it was the same miracle and nobody knew the numbers for sure, or the disciples got the numbers mixed up. The truth is that there are no errors in the Bible - there were **two** miracles in which the Lord fed the multitude. In one miracle, 4000 men besides women and children were fed, totaling perhaps 12,000 people. In the more familiar miracle, 5000 men plus women and children were fed, and the crowd may have totaled as many as 20,000!

Besides the difference in numbers, there are six further significant differences:

**a. Different locations.** The location of the feeding of 5000 was the northern or northeastern end of the Sea of Galilee, whereas the feeding of 4000 took place at the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:3).

**b. Different ethnic groups.** Jewish people were involved in the feeding of the 5000, whereas here in Mark 8, in the area of the Decapolis, it was probably primarily Gentile people. In these miracles we see that God’s grace goes out to Jews **and** Gentiles.

**c. Different time lengths.** In the feeding of the 4000, the crowd had been with Him three days, with nothing to eat. *“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat”* (v2). In the feeding of the 5000, the people had been with the Lord for only one day.

**d. Different amounts of food used.** In the feeding of the 5000, the Lord used five loaves and two fish, whereas here He used seven loaves and a few small fish (v5&7).

**e. Different amounts of leftovers.** In the feeding of the 5000 twelve baskets were left over, but in the feeding of the 4000 there were seven baskets of leftovers (v8). It’s interesting that two different words for *basket* are used. In the feeding of the 5000, it’s a small basket, like a lunch basket, whereas in the feeding of the 4000 it was a large basket - more like a big hamper. The same word for large basket is used in Acts 9:25 when the apostle Paul was lowered down over the wall in a basket, to escape from death in Damascus. So if you want a little Bible trivia question, you could ask, “Which feeding miracle had more leftovers - the feeding of the 5000 or the feeding of the 4000?” If the answer is “the feeding of the 5000,” you could say “No!” - because the seven baskets in the feeding of the 4000 were much bigger baskets, so much more was left over!

**f. Different events followed.** The events following the feedings are different. After the feeding of the 5000, the Lord went by Himself to the mountain to pray, and sent the disciples to go across the Sea of Galilee. When a storm came up, the Lord came to the struggling disciples walking on the water, and they landed at Gennesaret. After the feeding of the 4000 they all went together across the Sea of Galilee. There was no storm, no walking on the water, and they landed at Dalmanutha, a few miles north of Tiberias.

## Doctrinal Point

### God provides bread in the desolate wilderness places.

Verse 4, *“Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”*

What’s the answer? The answer is, humanly speaking, nobody. **But God can!** God can provide bread in the wilderness!

Mark 10:27 says, *“With man it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”* God can provide bread in the wilderness, and this is really the lesson of this miracle.

The “Bread” we’re talking about here is Christ Himself. In John 6, after the feeding of the 5000, the Lord gave His “Bread of Life discourse,” and there He referred to Himself as the true Bread of Life. The Lord is the true Bread that comes down from Heaven. The essential spiritual meaning of both of the “feeding” miracles is that Jesus Christ Himself is the Bread from Heaven, and He is our provision for the wilderness of life. If we come to Christ, our spiritual hunger will be satisfied.

Life in this world without Christ really is a wilderness. There may be short-lived oases of fun and pleasure, and people think that will satisfy the emptiness and hunger in their lives - but ultimately it's a drag. It's still a wilderness. There's no true fulfillment. But in Christ there is provision for the emptiness of the wilderness. He is the true Bread, the Bread of Life.

God not only provides salvation when we come to Christ as sinners - He also provides spiritual food for our spiritual needs as we live the Christian life. And we won't be just partially filled – verse 8 says that they were completely filled! All that we need to satisfy our spiritual need is found in Christ. He's the true Bread of Life.

Are you spiritually hungry? Do you feel empty? Does life seem like a wilderness? Come to Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. God provides the True Bread in the wilderness.

## Practical Applications

### 1. The Lord knows and cares about all our personal needs.

Psalm 103 says, *“As a father has compassion on his children, the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him.”*

The Lord said, *“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar”* (v2-3). The Lord Jesus showed God's wonderful compassion here, and this is a great lesson for us. The Lord knows about all our personal needs – and **He cares!**

Our Lord was moved with compassion in Mark 6:34, at the feeding of the 5000 - particularly in reference to their spiritual needs. He saw them “like sheep without a shepherd.” In the feeding of the 4000 our Lord moved with compassion for their physical needs. So the Lord knows and cares for our needs, both spiritual and physical.

Notice - the Lord knew that they were hungry. He knew that they would faint if they didn't get food soon. He understood their weaknesses. He knew that some of them had come a long way. He knew everything about them!

The Lord knows everything about us as well. Do you think the Lord knows how far you can go before you become weak and faint? Do you think the Lord knows how much sleep you need, or the amount of strength you need to do what He has called you to do? Do you think the Lord knows how far you have to travel? Do you think the Lord knows what you need to keep you going, physically and emotionally? The Lord knows everything! We can apply this to both our physical and spiritual needs.

The Lord knows and cares about all of our personal needs. He knows, because He's omniscient - but He also cares, because He's compassionate. Hebrews 13:8 says that our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If He had compassion on the people in Mark 8, He certainly has compassion on us today as well.

Do you have any personal needs right now? Well, the Lord not only knows about those needs - He cares about them as well! It may seem at times that the Lord is delaying His help. Look again at verse 2: He delayed for three days. The Lord has His reasons when He delays. Although we may not understand His reasons, we can be sure that even when the Lord delays, He knows and cares about our needs. The Lord knows and cares about all our personal needs.

## **2. How soon we forget!**

Wouldn't you think that the disciples would have remembered the feeding of 5000 just a few months before this event? But they seemed to have forgotten that amazing miracle! Their question was like their previous reaction all over again. Well, let's not be too hard on the disciples. Remember how quickly we, too, tend to forget God's goodness!

If I were to ask how many of you have experienced answered prayer about your financial situation, it would probably be 100%. So why do we keep worrying about finances? How quickly we forget! God knows about all our needs, and He will take care of us - but how soon we forget His compassionate care for us.

Let's learn that lesson from this miracle. Let's not forget that God really cares for us and has compassion on us. He not only knows, He cares!

Let's not forget.