

The Gospel of John
Session Twelve: The Bread of Life
Commentary

John 6:22-59

6:23–24 Tiberias was and is the chief city on the western side of the lake (see v. 1). Whereas Capernaum was located on the northwestern edge of the lake, Tiberias is several miles to the south.

6:25 On the other side of the sea refers to the area in or around Capernaum (see vv. 23–24; cp. v. 59).

6:26 Jesus charged them with caring only about having full stomachs rather than about the significance of the signs.

6:27–29 People misunderstood Jesus’s statement and asked about the works God required. Jesus said the only “work” required by God is faith in Messiah. On seal of approval, see 3:33.

6:30 Again, the people misunderstood. They demanded a sign as evidence of Jesus’s claims (cp. 1Co 1:22). Jesus pointed to the significance of the “sign” he had just performed—the feeding of the crowd (cp. 2:18). This revealed people’s stubbornness, which led many of Jesus’s disciples to leave (6:60–66) and prompted John to indict the Jews for unbelief at the close of Jesus’s public ministry (12:37–40).

6:31 This verse links exodus and Passover motifs with Jesus as the prophet like Moses and the expectation that God would again provide manna in the messianic age. The OT reference seems to involve several passages, with Ps 78:23–24 being most prominent (Ex 16:4, 15; Neh 9:15; Ps 105:40).

6:32–34 The manna in the wilderness was pointing to the true bread from heaven, which is Jesus.

6:35, 48 I am the bread of life is the first of Jesus’s seven “I am” sayings in John. Subsequently he said he is “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5); “the gate” of the sheep (10:7, 9); the “good shepherd” (10:11, 14); “the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6); and “the true vine” (15:1). Apart from these sayings, there are statements where Jesus referred to himself as “I am” (6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5), a clear allusion to God’s identification as “I AM” (Ex 3:14).

6:36 The earthly thinking of Jesus’s audience resulted from their unbelief.

6:37, 44 Jesus affirmed the twin themes of election and perseverance of the saints, prominent topics in John’s Gospel. Those predestined by God will come to Jesus, and Jesus will preserve

his own. No one can come to Jesus apart from the Father's drawing him. These themes continue in the good shepherd discourse (10:28–29) and Jesus's final prayer (17:6, 9, 11–12).

6:38–39 The believer's security is founded on the Son's faithfulness in doing the Father's will.
6:40 On Jesus's promise of eternal life, see 3:16–18.

6:41, 43 The references to the complaining of the Jews highlights the parallel between Jews of Jesus's day and wilderness Israel (cp. Ex 16:2, 8–9; Nm 11:4–23; see Jn 6:5–6). The Israelites complained about the first giver of bread, Moses. Now they griped against the second giver, Jesus.

6:42 People showed no awareness of Jesus's virginal conception (Mt 1:18–25). They objected to Jesus's claim of descent from heaven since he was clearly human and was, they believed, conceived in the standard way (4:44).

6:44 On the "raising up" ministry of Jesus, see 12:32.

6:45 Citing Is 54:13, Jesus affirmed that, while his ministry fulfilled the prophetic vision that one day all people would be taught by God, this applied only to those who were drawn by the Father and who came to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

6:46 Learning from the Father and seeing him are different. Only Jesus has seen the Father—not even Moses has seen him, which makes Jesus's revelation greater than Moses's.

6:47–52 Jesus contrasted the manna in the wilderness and the bread from heaven. Only the latter can provide eternal life. Jesus's flesh refers to his body on the cross, given for sin. Such talk raised questions from his audience.

6:53–59 Jesus meant for his words to be taken neither in a literal nor in a sacramental sense. The Hebrew idiom "flesh and blood" refers to the total person. Nowhere is Jesus's teaching more shocking than here. Eternal life comes from eating his flesh and drinking his blood—that is, from believing in him.¹

¹ *CSB Study Bible*. Edited by Trevin Wax. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).