

CHAPTER 8

WITHDRAWALS FROM GALILEE

[*Harmony*, pp. 103-129]

Part 7: The Ministry of Christ Around Galilee

Lesson on the Bread of Life

Sec. 72: Return of the workers, Withdrawal from Galilee, Feeding the Five Thousand

Mark and Luke report that the apostles returned to Jesus and reported. At this point Matthew and John join them, and we have one of the few accounts in all four gospels.

Jesus decided to withdraw from the crowds of Galilee and took them to a town called Bethsaida on the north-eastern shore of the lake. He had told his disciples he wanted them to “come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31). Note the various reasons the *Harmony* suggests for this and the other withdrawals (p. 103, note a). However, the crowds followed him, and Jesus had compassion on them and healed many and preached to them.

The great miracle of feeding the 5000 is in all four gospels; it revealed him as the Messiah of Israel, who would shepherd his people. Attempts at rationalization continue (such as they all shared their lunches with each other), but most critics today simply assume the story is completely legendary. Evangelical believers accept the miracles of Jesus as historical. It is interesting that Jesus did not want the left-over food wasted, but had it collected. There probably is no particular symbolic importance to the numbers five, two and twelve—just a relation of the actual numbers to show the extent of the miracle.

Sec. 73: A premature attempt to make Jesus king blocked

Matthew, Mark, and John relate the next sections. Luke does not return until Section 82. The crowds try unsuccessfully to take Jesus by force to make him king. They were looking for the earthly ruler who would bring the blessings of the promised kingdom to Israel. But they did not understand that they were to repent, and that the Messiah must give his life. Jesus went up to pray in the mountain. Perhaps the devil was tempting him again with the promise of a great kingdom, and Jesus naturally had compassion for the people.

Sec. 74: Walking on the water during a storm on the lake

In the previous miracle, Jesus had shown himself able to provide for our food. In this miracle he proved he can provide for our safety in all situations, that he is master even of the elements. The disciples had gone back alone across the lake. At night during the great storm he came to them walking on the water. Again, rationalizations fail miserably to explain this miracle account. Peter's attempt to copy Jesus is recorded only in Matthew. Perhaps Peter out of modesty did not emphasize this story in his preaching, and thus Mark did not include it. The disciples' amazement culminated in the exclamation in Matthew, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt 14:33).

Sec. 75: Healings at Gennesaret

Gennesaret is the plain on the northern part of the western shore of the lake (see map in back of *Harmony*). At this point the healings were frequent and impressive.

Sec. 76: Discourse on the true bread of life, Defection among the disciples

While Matthew and Mark speak of the healings in Gennesaret, John here instead includes Jesus' great discourse to these "sunshine" disciples in the synagogue in the nearby village of Capernaum (the ruins of the synagogue there now come from a somewhat later time). This took place apparently shortly after the healings in Gennesaret. The details about the movement of the people are one indication that John's gospel was written by an eyewitness of the events.

This discussion naturally compared Jesus with Moses, through whom God fed the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years.

Jesus compared the physical bread they were seeking with the true spiritual bread he provided. He himself was "the bread of life." This is the first "I am" saying in John (there are seven; see references in the *Harmony*, p. 108, note n—John 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

“I am” sayings:

1. The Bread of Life (6:35)
2. The Light of the World (8:12)
3. The Door (10:7, 9)
4. The Good Shepherd (10:11, 14)
5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. The True Vine (15:1, 5)

John calls the miracles “signs” because they point to a truth about Jesus or his mission. Here the miracle of providing bread is a sign, because it points to Jesus as the source of life for our souls.

While John does not include the account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, he does record this discourse, which gives the spiritual meaning of the Eucharist. We must eat Jesus’ body and drink his blood to have eternal life; but this eating and drinking is spiritual (John 6:63). This is the essence of saving faith—trusting and relying on Jesus alone for salvation and acceptance with God.

These words were difficult and discouraging to the crowds, who wanted a simple king, not a theologically vexatious argument. They quickly became disillusioned and discouraged with Jesus and left him. After they left, Jesus challenged the Twelve, but they stayed with him, with Peter’s memorable answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68).

But the over-all cloud of darkness is settling over the gospel account. In addition to the defection of the crowds, Jesus notes the evil character of even one of his apostles. Judas Iscariot is then named by John, looking back—the first mention in the gospels of this tragic event.

Lesson on the Leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians

Jesus continued his ministry in the regions around Galilee, coming from time to time back to Capernaum and other places in Galilee. During this period the conflicts in Galilee increased, even as Jesus had a better reception among the Gentiles in the outlying regions. All that John notes is that Jesus stayed away from Judaea during this time, because the leaders there were trying to have him killed (John 7:1). John had already indicated that Jesus was in Galilee during the Passover of that year (according to chronology, A.D. 29; John 6:4). Luke is silent about the events in this set of sections; they are recorded only in Matthew and Mark.

Sec. 77: Conflict over the tradition of ceremonial uncleanness

In Galilee Jesus was confronted by emissaries from the leaders in Jerusalem. They attacked him because his disciples ignored the Pharisaical rule to ceremonially wash their hands before eating. Jesus' response is a classic statement of the essence of godliness and sinfulness as residing in the heart. Peter, especially, was concerned with this truth in his later ministry, and Mark gives Peter's interpretation of Jesus' teaching when he concludes, "In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19, in the best Greek texts and in modern versions; UBS {A}).

Sec. 78: Ministry to a believing Greek woman in Tyre and Sidon

A woman approached Jesus in the region north of Israel along the Mediterranean coast. This woman was willing to accept even the "crumbs" that the Jews had discarded. Jesus praised her as one of "great faith," and Jesus healed her demon-possessed daughter. Here faith is found outside national Israel.

Sec. 79: Healings in Decapolis, Feeding the four thousand in Decapolis

Jesus then traveled to the other side of Galilee, to the Decapolis, to the east of the lake. Here his healings again made a great impression in a Gentile area. A second time Jesus fed a great multitude, with somewhat different numbers from the first time (7 loaves, "a few" fish, 7 baskets). That both feedings took place is specified in both Matthew and Mark (Matt 16:9-10; Mark 8:19-20). The reaction of the crowd is not stated in the text, but probably was one of wonder and amazement.

Sec. 80: Return to Galilee and encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees

This controversy with the Pharisees and Sadducees took place in Magadan (probably same region as other name, Dalmanutha; see map at back of *Harmony*), at the western point of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus again offered the sign of Jonah as the only sign to show his authority to them.

Sec. 81: Warning about the error of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians; Healing a blind man at Bethsaida

As Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake to the east, he warned them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mark also mentions “of Herod” instead of the Sadducees). By this he meant their false teaching. The *Harmony* notes some high points of their teaching (p. 115, note z).

This Bethsaida may be the same as that mentioned in Luke 9:10, on the east side of the lake. Many have noticed the relatively gradual healing of this blind man, and have assumed some sort of rationalistic explanation. This is not necessary, as an examination of all Jesus’ miracles will show a great diversity in the methods used. Note that the “messianic secret” idea still is present in Jesus’ speaking to this healed man.

Lesson of Messiahship Learned and Confirmed

We now have reached the pinnacle of glory in Jesus’ earthly career, when he is transfigured by the Father before his closest disciples. Edersheim outlines his life of Jesus with this event being the turning point—from the “ascent” to the “descent.” These events are recorded in the three Synoptic gospels.

Sec. 82: Peter’s identification of Jesus as the Christ and first prophecy of the church

Caesarea Philippi is far to the north east from where Jesus normally ministered. It was a beautiful forested area, in the territory of Philip the Tetrarch, half-brother of Herod Antipas. Jesus used this time alone with his disciples to bring them into a better understanding of him and themselves.

Jesus asked them boldly who people said he was, then who the disciples themselves thought him to be. Matthew gives the fullest account of the three, with Peter telling Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Mark has, “You are the Christ,” and Luke, “You are the Christ of God.” In any event, here is a clear recognition by the disciples of Jesus’ office as Messiah—a point critical scholars dispute. As a result, they often re-structure the text to deny that Jesus made such a claim; however, these efforts show a definite bias, and are destructive to the text.

Jesus told Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” He gave to him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Peter’s leadership among the apostles is recorded in the gospels and in the book of Acts. He was the one God used first to open the kingdom to the Gentiles.

Sec. 83: First direct prediction of the rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection

Jesus now distinctly predicted his coming Passion. Peter rejected the idea, and Jesus soundly rebuked him as “Satan.” The temptation to avoid the cross was indeed satanic, and Peter was his well-meaning means of temptation. Jesus then went ahead and told them that one’s soul far outweighed his earthly life.

Sec. 84: Coming of the Son of Man and judgment

Jesus often spoke of himself as the Son of Man; here he predicted the Son of Man’s coming in judgment at the last day. He then said “some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.” This passage has been much debated; it seems that the best interpretation is that some of those apostles would see the power of the coming kingdom, and the glory of the Messiah in it—this took place immediately after when Peter, James, and John witnessed the transfiguration, which Peter later described in those terms (power, coming, majesty, honor, glory, 2 Pet 1:16-18).

Sec. 85: Transfiguration of Jesus

The high mountain probably is Mt. Hermon. The glory of Jesus was similar to that John later saw on the island of Patmos (Rev 1). The Father testified to Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” The apostles also witnessed Moses and Elijah talking with him, representing the law and the prophets. Luke says they were talking about his coming “departure” in Jerusalem, meaning his death. Peter’s impetuous suggestion of building three shrines is understandable in the circumstances.

Sec. 86: Discussion of resurrection, Elijah, and John the Baptist

Coming back from the mountain, they discussed Jesus’ relation to prophecy. Jesus predicted his resurrection, and told them to not announce his transfiguration until that time. Responding to their questions, he said that Elijah would come as promised (Mal 4:5-6) before the end time, but that John the Baptist had fulfilled that office, but the people had rejected him, and therefore the kingdom was to come later.

Lessons of Responsibility to Others

These next lessons and discussions took place as Jesus traveled back into Galilee and went around that place. They are recorded in the Synoptics, especially Matthew and Mark. This probably took place through the summer and early fall of A.D. 29.

Sec. 87: Healing of demoniac boy and unbelief rebuked

Jesus returned to the other nine apostles to find them embroiled in a dispute with some teachers of the law—Jesus' disciples could not cure a certain demon-possessed boy. Jesus' strong rebuke was probably directed at the unbelieving crowd, not the disciples (see *Harmony*, p. 121 note *o*). The boy's father gave an answer of faith, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Jesus then cast out the demon and healed the boy. He explained to the disciples that this kind could come out only by prayer (fasting was added in later MSS).

Sec. 88: Second prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection

A second time Jesus predicted his Passion and his resurrection on the third day. Again the disciples failed to understand what he meant, and probably the near time of these events.

Sec. 89: Payment of the temple tax

Matthew (a tax collector) alone relates this event. Jesus directed Peter to find a four-drachma coin from the mouth of a fish. This miracle of providence and knowledge shows God's entire sovereignty over all events, small and great. It also shows that Jesus recognized the obligation of people to pay their taxes.

Sec. 90: Rivalry over greatness in the kingdom

In Capernaum the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus did not dispute their understanding of the kingdom. But he did dispute their ambition. They must become as little children to even enter the kingdom. Children recognize their insufficiency and their reliance on others, as we must with Christ.

Sec. 91: Warning against causing believers to sin

Jesus warned them to accept all who are Christ's, and to be of service to them. The big enemy is one's own sinful nature. We are to be willing to "pass the sentence of death on ourselves," "cutting off" or "gouging out" our limbs or eyes to avoid sin and enter righteousness. These figures of speech tell us that Jesus demands total obedience, and that salvation therefore

can come only through him. At this point Matthew records the parable of the good shepherd and the lost sheep.

Sec. 92: Treatment and forgiveness of a sinning brother

Matthew 18 records how Jesus told the disciples that they must forgive those who sin against them perpetually (“seventy-seven times”). He followed with the parable of the unjust servant who would not forgive his fellow servant.

Journey to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles

Jesus had stayed away from Jerusalem, apparently, for many months. During the celebrations of Passover and Pentecost in A.D. 29 he had been in Galilee and other regions, not in Judaea. Opposition and hostility there had made it unsafe, and they were not willing to hear his message or receive him. But now Jesus “set his face” to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). In the next half year he attended at least three different festivals there in Jerusalem (Tabernacles, Dedication, Passover), being crucified during that final Passover. Luke’s gospel, especially, emphasizes this final approach to his death in Jerusalem.

Sec. 93: Complete commitment required of followers

Jesus warned would-be followers that there would be few comforts and no excuses in their service for Christ.

Sec. 94: Ridicule by Jesus’ half-brothers

Now, at last, John’s gospel rejoins the others. John emphasizes Jesus’ Judean ministry more than the Galilean.

Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (fall, A.D. 29), but did not tell his brothers. His brothers ridiculed him, not believing in him at that time; they said he should go and make himself known. He stayed behind while they went.

Sec. 95: Journey through Samaria

Luke and John share in this section. Actually, through much of the final months of Jesus' ministry, these two gospels complement each other.

After his brothers left, Jesus went also. Instead of traveling across the Jordan and through Perea, as most Galilean Jews did, Jesus went directly through Samaria, as he had done at the beginning of his ministry. This time the people in Samaria did not receive Jesus, and he had to restrain his disciples from their zealous indignation—we can see why James and John were called “sons of thunder”!

Note the expression in Luke, “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (9:51); he had determined to fulfill his Father's plan and offer himself as our sacrifice for sin.